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**DID ORIGEN TEACH REINCARNATION? A RESPONSE TO NEO-GNOSTIC THEORIES
OF CHRISTIAN REINCARNATION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ORIGEN AND
TO THE SECOND COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (553)**

by

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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ABSTRACT

Modern proponents of ancient Gnosticism claim that Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and the early Church fathers embraced reincarnation. However, their attempts to associate reincarnation with early Christianity belie their metaphysical bias, which is the basis of their historical revisionism.

Because their hermeneutics are flawed, the neo-Gnostic interpretation of Scripture differs significantly from traditional Christian interpretations. In order to justify their doctrines of karma and reincarnation, neo-Gnostics revise Church history so that it reflects their metaphysical worldview. Their attempt to revise church history, creates the illusion that the Bible teaches reincarnation. However, neither the Old or New Testaments teaches reincarnation, which is why the neo-Gnostic preconceptions are baseless.

The neo-Gnostic claim that the early fathers embraced reincarnation is also false. Indeed, the overwhelming evidence indicates that they repudiated reincarnation. Moreover, the neo-Gnostic assumption that Origen embraced transmigration because he assimilated Neo-Platonic ideas, is baseless. While he investigated the subject of transmigration, he rejected it because it was not compatible with Christian belief.

The facts surrounding the Fifth General Council (553) contradict the neo-Gnostic notion that clerics excised reincarnation from the Bible. Rather, the council issued *anathemas* against the Origenist' and their hyper-Origen views, and not against Origen. The weight of scholarly opinion supports this contention. Moreover, the development and final canonization of the New Testament by the fourth century precludes the possibility that reincarnation was a biblical doctrine in the sixth century. Manuscripts dating from the second through sixth century bear this out.

The neo-Gnostics argue that Origen's writings prove he embraced transmigration of souls. However, while some passages seem to suggest that he embraced it, a closer examination of them indicate that he did not. Indeed, most scholars agree that reliable translations of Origen demonstrate that he rejected transmigration. Moreover, Origen's response to Celsus' attack against Christian belief, leaves no doubt that he rejected transmigration of souls.

Finally, the concepts of karma and reincarnation are fundamentally opposed to Christianity. Not only are they theologically and etymologically unrelated, they are inherently contradictory. Indeed, neither the Bible, the Rule of Faith, or Christian creeds or confession, mentions reincarnation! The neo-Gnostic claim that the early Christian's embraced reincarnation until its excision from the Bible in 553, is therefore, false.

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Introduction

The Winds of Change

Until recently, Judaeo-Christianity was the dominating cultural influence in America. However, with the emergence of Eastern-based religion around the turn of the century, the spiritual landscape began to change.¹ By the early 1960's and well into the 1980's, the spiritual pendulum shifted dramatically towards an interest in a religious philosophy that blended Eastern and Western based ideas best represented by the so-called New Age Movement. While this cultural phenomenon is not a movement in a unified social sense, it does encompass several unifying religious and philosophical ideas. Most researchers agree that this new spirituality represents a "...set of cosmological ideas and spiritual practices."² That is, followers typically embrace elements of Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism, and other strains of Eastern thought. However, as widespread as this *movement* is and as spiritually evolved, as it may appear, it is not new as it represents varieties of ancient Gnosticism.³ Indeed, aspects of this syncretistic ideology (hereafter, neo-Gnosticism) are evident in a several new-age religions today including Unity, Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, and in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical Society. Scholars differ whether neo-Paganism should be included in this mix of religions.⁴ To a much lesser extent, shades of neo-Gnosticism are present in the Word-Faith movement.⁵

Historical Revisionism

All neo-Gnostics embrace the teaching of reincarnation or transmigration of souls. While in my view this doctrine has never been considered compatible with Christian doctrine, neo-Gnostic writers assert that early Christians embraced reincarnation until clerics removed it from the Bible at the Fifth General Council (c. 553). They also allege that Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and the early Church fathers

1 The World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 introduced Eastern-based religion to America. For details, see David J. Bertuca, Donald K. Hartman, and Susan M. Neumeister, *The World's Columbian Exposition: a Centennial Bibliographic Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

2 Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self: a Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 4.

3 Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992).

4 Daren Kemp, *New Age: A Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 8-10.

5 D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: Biblical and Historical Insights into the Word of Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Updated Sub edition, 1995).

embraced reincarnation. While our study will investigate whether Christ and the Apostles taught reincarnation, it will not be exhaustive, as others have already accomplished this.⁶ Our aim, rather, is to examine whether the early fathers (particularly Origen) embraced it and whether clerics excised it from the Bible, in 553. However, refuting these allegations will not discourage neo-Gnostics from revising Church history, as their intent is to legitimize reincarnation with Christianity even if it means that they manipulate the facts. Regardless, an examination of their arguments is necessary because it will expose their philosophical and theological bias. Moreover, ignoring their revisionism allows the lines of distinction that define Eastern and Western-based religion to become so blurred that one will hardly recognize either.

The neo-Gnostic claim that early Christians embraced reincarnation suggests that the beliefs of these early Christians differed substantially from Christian belief today. This implies that no doctrinal continuity exists between early and modern Christianity. However, we will argue that the absence of reincarnation in Christianity today, is proof of its implicit rejection by the early Christians and not a result of its having been removed from the Bible in the sixth century.

Let us assume that the early Christians embraced reincarnation and that the neo-Gnostics are correct. This would mean that basic Christian doctrine today needs radical revision. The traditional meaning and significance of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ would need to correspond essentially to the metaphysics of reincarnation. Other doctrines such as the atonement for sin, divine judgment, and the resurrection of the body, would need radical reinterpretation in order to reflect karma (the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences) and reincarnation. Additionally, the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox understanding of the early fathers' views of Scripture and Christian belief would need rethinking in order to acknowledge that the fathers' writings reflect adherence to reincarnation, not a rejection of it. If the assumption that clerics excised reincarnation from the Bible in the sixth century were true, it would be the responsibility of Christian scholars today to revisit the facts and subsequently amend all modern references to it. Indeed, a complete revision of Church history, Christian philosophy, and Christian theology would be necessary. Moreover, all Bible commentaries, encyclopedic entries, theological journals, and monographs where reincarnation is considered incompatible with Christian belief, would require significant editorial revision.

Faulty Assumptions

If the early Christians removed reincarnation from the Bible, then the text that we possess today is

⁶ See for example, Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 138-140; John P. Newport, *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

flawed and incomplete. That is, if the early manuscripts, which are the basis of modern translations, imply something other than what the translators suggest, the text cannot be trusted. Textual scholars and Bible translators aware of these revisions would be guilty of perpetuating flawed translations of the Bible. If these allegations were true, they would be morally obligated to reproduce modern Bible translations that would include references to reincarnation, as they appeared in manuscripts dating from the first through sixth centuries.

The neo-Gnostics argue that the early Christians altered ecclesiastical history by removing reincarnation from the Bible. However, determining whether this is true or not requires that we adequately examine the data. We will demonstrate that when presented, the data actually refutes the notion that early Christians excised reincarnation from the Bible. Nevertheless, in order to understand how the neo-Gnostic opinion forms and why they insist that the early Christians embraced reincarnation, we will in **chapter one**, present the Neo-Gnostic case for “Christian Reincarnationism.”

Examining Key Factors Surrounding Origen and Reincarnation

An examination of the life and teachings of Origen is especially important as neo-Gnostic writers cite him more than they cite any other in their defense of reincarnation. Accordingly, the degree to which the culture influenced him, may determine whether he embraced reincarnation or not. His Christian upbringing, knowledge of Scripture, and devotion to the Rule of Faith,⁷ all influence him greatly. If he embraced reincarnation, we may correctly assume that it was compatible with his Christian faith and the neo-Gnostics would be correct. However, if his thinking reflected a wholesale denial of reincarnation, we may confidently conclude that he rejected it. Nevertheless, we will demonstrate that the absence of reincarnation in his thinking is due largely to his interpretation of the Scriptures and on his views of cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology; all of which repudiate any such notion.

While our thesis does not address reincarnation and the closure of the New Testament canon by the fourth century, it is worth noting that reincarnation is absent from those books recognized by early Christians as divinely inspired and therefore, authoritative. If reincarnation is not mentioned in the 27 books deemed canonical, we may reasonably assume that neither Christ nor the Apostles taught it, as their teachings are the basis upon which the New Testament is formed. A brief survey of the various canons from the second through fourth century bears this out. However, if reincarnation is evident in manuscripts dating to the sixth century (before clerics allegedly excise it from the Bible) it would be obvious. Again, manuscripts from the second through sixth centuries demonstrate that reincarnation is

⁷ While some scholars debate its precise character and content, most consider it an authoritative digest or summary of Christian belief. See, Paul M. Blowers, ‘Rule of Faith’ in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, John Anthony McGuckin, ed., (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 187-189.

not mentioned.

The details surrounding the Fifth Ecumenical Council are also integral to our investigation, as the neo-Gnostic argument hinges on whether clerics excise reincarnation from the Bible at that time. If the facts surrounding this council contradict the neo-Gnostic claim, their argument is baseless. Indeed, a detailed examination of the events leading up to this council as well as a review of the proceedings, will refute the notion that they mention reincarnation.

Our investigation will demonstrate that neo-Gnostic authors distort historical facts, omit crucial detail, and create the illusion that reincarnation is compatible with Christianity. Consequently, their theories have no basis in fact which is why mainstream historians should reject their claims. Indeed, the early Christians are not guilty of revising Church history; the neo-Gnostics are because they alter the facts to suit their religious bias. Again, a thorough examination of these issues will put to rest their argument that the early Christians embraced reincarnation.

Methodology

Our aim is not to refute the metaphysical or philosophical aspects of reincarnation. Rather, our aim is to examine the historical revisionism of the neo-Gnostics. Refuting reincarnation from the Scriptures would be rather simple.⁸ However, the issues surrounding reincarnation and early Christianity involve historical, theological, and textual considerations. That is, if correct, the reincarnation position demands a re-interpretation of the early fathers as well as a re-examination of the facts surrounding the development and fixation of the New Testament canon. Moreover, it requires a thorough examination of Origen's writings, as he is the early father most often cited for proof of reincarnation. He is the one allegedly condemned at the Fifth General Council for embracing preexistence of souls and by implication, reincarnation. He also allegedly assimilated Greek philosophy with Christian belief, which, for neo-Gnostics, accounts for his embracing reincarnation. Finally, he is the early father to whom neo-Gnostic writers appeal for legitimizing Christian belief in reincarnation today. We will therefore present, in **chapter two**, an overview of source testimony and modern debate on the subject, in order to ascertain whether Origen embraced transmigration or not,

Origen and His Culture

As we have demonstrated in chapter three, the historical-cultural milieu of Origen's time reflects the influence of Hellenism on the great city of Alexandria, Egypt. At that time, it was a prominent cultural, political, intellectual, and economic metropolis. Alexandria's great library, tradition of scholarship, and

⁸ See this writer's MA thesis presented to the Simon Greenleaf School of Law entitled, "A Biblical, Scientific, and Historical Examination of Reincarnation" (1985).

its intellectual and religious life are well known. The city attracted individuals thirsty for knowledge as well as teachers ready to impart their particular brand of philosophy. Indeed, the Hellenistic world of Alexandria was thoroughly syncretistic. That is, the culture represented a mix of religion and philosophy. While traditional Platonism remained strong in Athens, in Alexandria it evolved into Middle Platonism (a transition phase from traditional Platonism to Neo-Platonism). Much like neo-Gnostic ideas today, Middle Platonism represents a system of pantheistic eclecticism and philosophical religious syncretism. It sought to reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy with Oriental religion and theosophy.⁹ Neo-Platonism therefore, represented a system comprised of physics, religion, and philosophy.

Because Origen attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas, the founder of Neo-Platonism, some scholars believe that he was a Neo-Platonist. However, the degree that he borrowed Neo-Platonist ideas is debatable. We will argue that while Origen sometimes borrowed Platonists concepts to communicate the Christian faith, he rejected many of its core tenets. Indeed, the extent to which he depended on Greek philosophy will have enormous bearing on the overall analysis of our thesis.

Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Neo-Pythagoreanism, also maintained a following in Alexandria. A large community of Hellenized Jews lived there as well. They combined elements of Judaism with Hellenistic philosophy while observing their own Jewish religion. Philo Judaeus (25 B.C. to A.D. 50) is the most notable among the Alexandrian Jewish intellectuals. His ideas influenced Origen's thinking to some extent.

A variety of Gnostic Schools also flourished in Alexandria. Gnosticism in this period integrated occultism, Oriental mysticism, astrology, magic, elements from Jewish tradition, Christian views of redemption, and even aspects of Plato. While Gnostic systems varied, scholars generally agree that they had a common worldview shaped by Hellenism and Neo-Platonism, which combined elements of esoteric Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient heritages of Egypt and Mesopotamia.¹⁰ However, I shall argue that while Origen understood Gnostic ideas, he rejected them because they were incompatible with Christian belief.

Was Origen a Christian Platonist?

Scholars generally agree that there are many facets to Origen, which is why he is difficult to figure out. As we will show, at times Origen seems to entertain aspects of reincarnation yet, in other instances, he rejected it. Nevertheless, if he embraced reincarnation, one would expect to find evidence

⁹ D.A. Rees, 'Platonism and the Platonic Tradition' in *the Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 5, Paul Edwards, ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & the Free Press, 1972), 337-338.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the basic tenets of Hellenism, see Ronald Nash, *Christianity & the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

of it in his writings. Indeed, his harshest critics accused him of embracing it. Methodius of Olympus, Peter of Alexandria, Jerome, Epiphanius, and Justinian, were either misinformed or intent on hurting his reputation.¹¹ Moreover, doctrines adopted by his followers (the Origenist), were falsely attributed to Origen- as is the case regarding the anathemas issued at the Fifth General Council. However, even if Origen was condemned for embracing preexistence of souls - a doctrine that he admits is theoretical- it does not prove that he embraced reincarnation.

The argument that Origen embraced transmigration of souls is essentially moot if Christ and the Apostles rejected it and it is not present in the Rule of Faith. That is, Origen regarded the Scriptures and the Rule of Faith as foundational to his worldview. If reincarnation is not evident in these sources, we can assume that Origen rejected it.

With exception of some of his more speculative ideas, Origen submitted his thinking to these sources throughout his life. Despite this, neo-Gnostics assert that he embraced some form of reincarnation. However, their argument appeals to select passages in Origen's writings that seem to support reincarnation. While Origen's commentaries on the subject dispel any doubt that he considers reincarnation a viable option, we will demonstrate that he rejected transmigration because it was incompatible with Christian faith.

Scholars debate the extent to which Origen depended on Platonism. While Greek ideas influenced him, they did not dominate his thinking. However, we will show that to whatever degree the culture influenced him, his Christian upbringing, devotion to the Scriptures, and to the Rule of Faith, prevented him from assimilating transmigration of souls. That Origen embraced reincarnation rests primarily on two neo-Gnostic assumptions: first, Origen is a follower of Neo-Platonism, and two, clerics at the Fifth Ecumenical Council condemned Origen for holding the doctrines of preexistence of souls and, by implication, transmigration. However, an examination of these assumptions indicates that while he dialogues with others on the subject, he rejected it. Indeed, his response to Celsus' attacks against the Christian Faith indicates that the Christian hope of resurrection has no dependency on transmigration.¹² Several other passages demonstrate that he explicitly rejected transmigration as well.¹³ Origen's rejection of reincarnation is obvious for several reasons: (1) the migration of souls is not a Christian theme; (2) it lacks proof from Scripture; and, (3) Christian eschatology has no legitimate place for it.

Origen believed that reincarnation was a foreign idea known primarily among non-Christians;

11 Daley, 60-64. See also, Jon F. Dechow, 'The Heresy Charges Against Origen' in *Origeniana Quarta* (Innsbruck-Wein: Innsbrucker theologische Studien, 1987), 112-122 and, by the same author, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press), 1988.

12 *CCels* 7.32

13 See for example, *ComMt* 11.17, *CommJohn* 6.11.14, and *ComRm* 6.6.8. See also *PArch* 1.8.4 where Origen argues that '...a perverse doctrine such as this [transmigration from humans to animals] is valuable for discussion, only and then to be discarded.'

neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition entertained the idea. While individual Christians considered its merits, the early Christian debate on the subject was minimal. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Arnobius, and Origen, wrote scathing commentary against transmigration of souls.

Some Christian sects taught that the Bible supported the migration of souls. Their major text was *Matthew* 11:14 where it implied that John the Baptist is Elijah, come back (reincarnated). They drew conclusions from a text without consulting corresponding texts, in order to justify belief in reincarnation. They therefore assumed that Elijah's soul experienced a new incorporation in the body of John the Baptist.

Origen challenged their interpretation noting that apart from *Matthew* 11, there are no additional proofs that support their contention. In other words, there is insufficient evidence to prove that the Bible teaches the migration of souls. Moreover, the scriptures contradict reincarnation because it assumes migration results from previous sin. Origen believed that this does not solve the problem of sin, as the next incorporation does not guarantee that the human condition will be better or worse. Moreover, asserting that Elijah's soul incorporates into John's body implies the incarnation is due to sin. However, the same angel that announced the birth of Jesus announced the birth of John! The contradiction is obvious.

Origen addressed another difficulty related to transmigration: a series of rebirths, because of sin, continues indefinitely in the reincarnation cycle. However, this does not agree with the biblical view of an end or restoration of all things back to the Creator. Origen repeatedly sets the end and downfall of the world over against the migration of souls. That is, transmigration presupposes that the soul, which comes into a body, brings with it guilt from the period before birth which it has to expiate in this world. However, Christians believe that life is about success and failure in this world. Therefore, transmigration of souls has no legitimate place in Christian eschatology. While Origen toys with the idea of transmigration, he does not consider it to be compatible with Christian doctrine. Indeed, he addresses the subject in order to treat its questions and problems, not because he embraced it.

While Origen placed intrinsic significance and inner logic to the notion of transmigration, he could not find it central and indispensable. In fact, his attitude regarding the end of the world and the impending judgment, excludes ongoing cyclical existence. Thus, a continual change of bodies for souls assumes no end and further incorporation of souls because they constantly sin, will continue forever. Moreover, preexistence souls experience their incorporation, once, at creation as a punishment for their fall. While the venue changes for some souls because of sin, it is the same body. Therefore, bodies remain identical, but change qualitatively as reward and punishment, depending on how they come through their trials. Origen believed that the human soul accepts its responsibility before God in the one earthy body, apart from multiple migrations and with final judgment in mind.

Finally, Origen believed that the soul migrating from one body to another was not compatible with Christian theology. While discussed by academics in philosophical discourse, Christians did not pay

much attention to transmigration theories. While Christians participated in debates about the soul, its nature, because reincarnation contradicted the Christian hope of resurrection, they give it no serious thought.¹⁴

Does Preexistence Presuppose Transmigration?

Let us suppose that Origen embraced the preexistence of the soul. It still does not prove transmigration as he rejected the Gnostic and Platonist theories.¹⁵ In fact, some scholars argue that except in, “vestigial form that is not heretical,” Origen never embraces preexistence.¹⁶ The assertion that an ecclesiastical body condemns him for embracing preexistence and by implication, reincarnation, is therefore, baseless. In fact, Origen developed a *theory* of preexistence in response to Platonist and Gnostic tendencies, not because of reincarnation. He rejected the Platonist doctrine that before birth the soul determines its lot in life as well as the Gnostic notion of the origin of the soul.¹⁷ Moreover, he countered their arguments by arguing that while ‘intelligences’ or rational minds, existed before the material world,¹⁸ they occupy heaven, not earth. Additionally, these souls do not reincarnate in animals (as in Plato), or in plants as in Plotinus.¹⁹ Nevertheless, we will demonstrate, in contrast to the Platonist and Gnostic views, that Origen’s theory of the soul is an attempt to reconcile human freedom with God’s justice.

The neo-Gnostic assumption that preexistence implies transmigration is also a misnomer. Actually, it is just the opposite: transmigration presupposes preexistence of souls; otherwise, transmigration makes no sense. Moreover, transmigration is subject to karmic law. That is, the deeds or actions (karma) committed in a previous life determine the soul’s incarnation. Indeed, transmigration is unnecessary where there is no karmic debt. Conversely, a soul that accumulates karma necessitates multiple rebirths. While karma and transmigration are mutually dependent, preexistence by itself may preclude transmigration. That is, one may embrace preexistence of souls (even hypothetically) and reject transmigration. This appears to be the case with Origen. A contemporary religion illustrates our

¹⁴ While most of these points are discussed in our study, this summary is taken from Norbert Bronx’s, ‘The Early Christian Debate on the Migration of Souls’ in *Concilium*, Herman Häring and Johann-Baptist Metz, eds., *Reincarnation or Resurrection?* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 75-80.

¹⁵ Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 87-122.

¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹⁷ Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans., A.S. Worall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 207.

¹⁸ Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, ‘Preexistence’ in McGuckin, *The Westminster*, 178.

¹⁹ Henry Chadwick, Trans, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Great Britain: Cambridge at the University Press, 1953), 179.

point. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) teaches the preexistence of souls and yet rejects reincarnation. While one may infer that their emphasis on good works corresponds to karma, it is not based on transmigration theory. That is, Mormon doctrine teaches that good works in this one life are the basis for future immortality, and not on the basis of multiple rebirths. Thus, there is no correlation between the semi-Pelagianism of Mormonism and the karmic aspect of transmigration theory. Nevertheless, to argue that belief in preexistence necessitates belief in reincarnation is to commit the logical fallacy that assumes a causal link based on correlation.²⁰

The presence of the Christian faith in Egypt and its impact upon the Hellenistic culture is significant. By the third century, Carthage and Alexandria were centers of Christian theological development with leading figures such as Tertullian (C.E. 160-225), Clement of Alexandria (C.E. 150-211), and of course, Origen (C.E. 185-254). However, because of Platonic and Gnostic influences, Alexandrian Christianity reflected a fundamentally intellectual faith. Thus, prominent Christian teachers such as Pantaenus (C.E. 200) and Clement preach a Gospel that was intellectually respectable. Clement deals specifically with the relationship of philosophy to Christianity by showing similarities between philosophical ideas and Scripture. He believes that the Greek philosophers and poets guess at the truth, while the prophets point the way to salvation. Of course, Clement's strict rationalism and reliance on Greek philosophy often blurs the lines between pagan and Christian thinking. Nonetheless, after Pantaenus, Clement becomes the head of a Christian school in Alexandria where the first institutionalized form of Christian education takes place. After Clement left because of heavy persecution, Origen took his place as Head of the school.

The Witness of the Fathers

We will argue that the vast majority of the early fathers, including Justin Martyr, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Jerome, reject reincarnation.²¹ Despite the evidence, neo-Gnostics point to Origen as sure proof of reincarnation in early Christianity. That said, scholarly opinion of Origen and reincarnation generally favors one of the following viewpoints: (1) Origen held to the prevailing transmigration views of his day (borrowing from Pythagorean, Platonic, or neo-Platonic philosophy); (2) Origen embraces some *form* of reincarnation but not identical to or in

²⁰ Thus the Latin, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* ('after this, therefore, because of this'), Francis Watanabe Dauer, *Critical Thinking: an Introduction to Reasoning* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1989), 74-75.

²¹ See for example, Paul Siwek, *The Enigma of the Hereafter* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1952); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961); John Hick, *Death & Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); Hans Küng, *Eternal Life? Life After Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem* (New York: Crossroad, 1996); Norman L. Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986); and, Gary R. Habermas and J.P. Moreland, *Immortality: the Other Side of Death* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992).

any way similar to transmigration; and, (3) Origen rejects reincarnation. Of course, we will examine each of these views showing why the third position is preferred. While neo-Gnostics support position one or two, their reasons are presumptuous. That is, they typically cite the early fathers without due consideration for the broader context of their writings. As a result, the impression is that they affirm reincarnation. Additionally, they tend to quote from one or two sources (usually secondary sources) without consulting other sources vital to the outcome of the investigation. Nevertheless, we will demonstrate that the neo-Gnostic assumptions result from their philosophical and/or metaphysical bias. Refuting their assumptions will therefore silence their claims that Origen embraced reincarnation and that it is legitimate for Christians to embrace it today. Therefore, in **chapter three**, we will address Origen and the culture of his time in order to demonstrate that he resisted the urge to incorporate transmigration with Christian belief.

Are the Origen Texts Reliable?

Modern proponents of reincarnation argue that Origen's extant writings coupled with Rufinus' and Jerome's translations and other contemporary sources, prove that he embraced transmigration. Indeed, they cite Origen with such frequency that one would assume that overwhelming evidence exists that supports their claims. However, there are relatively few instances where Origen discusses the subject of transmigration. Even then, a fair reading suggests that he has no interest in embracing it. Origen's attitude is obvious in his direct response to a Gnostic sect embracing transmigration and in his defense of Christian belief against the attacks of Celsus, a misinformed pagan from an earlier period. Again, of the volumes that Origen produced over his lifetime, only a few passages refer to transmigration of souls. They appear in *First Principles*, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, *Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew*, and *Against Celsus*.

This raises the question of whether these sources are reliable. That is, unless the texts are reliable, one cannot know with some degree of certainty whether Origen embraces or denies transmigration. In other words, if the passages are questionable and untrustworthy, how can one prove anything about Origen? Conversely, if the texts are reliable and statements attributable to Origen are trustworthy, we may reasonably determine his attitude towards transmigration of souls.

Neo-Gnostic authors typically cite passages from *First Principles* (Origen's most notable work) as proof of transmigration. Among other things, Origen addresses various aspects of Christian philosophy. Unfortunately, only a few fragments of the original Greek exist in the *Philocalia*,²² and in

²² The *Philocalia* is a collection of Origen texts (extracts) compiled by Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzus between A.D. 350 to A.D. 360. See Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, Vol. I (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 542. See also Greek critical text, translation, and notes in *Origene, Philocalie* 21-27, *Sources Chretiennes* tome 226, Paris (1976), 11-13.

the edicts of Emperor Justinian.²³ We also possess Rufinus' Latin translation of *First Principles*, which favors Origen. That is, in order to protect Origen's reputation, Rufinus intentionally glossed over or omitted problematic texts. However, as we demonstrate in chapter 4, despite these shortcomings, scholars conclude that Rufinus' translation is essentially reliable or trustworthy.

Of monumental importance is Paul Koetschau's critical edition of *De Principiis*. His translation is a reconstruction from Greek and Latin quotations and reveals his attitude towards Rufinus' translation. While he produced a translation that assumes to be in agreement with Origen, where the text is lacking or unclear, he freely inserted secondary sources that agreed with his bias towards Origen.

Jerome is also an admirer of Origen and a good friend of Rufinus. While both he and Rufinus studied and translated Origen's works, they became bitter enemies because their views of Origen differed. Rufinus generally agreed with Origen while Jerome was convinced that aspects of Origen's teachings were heretical. In order to counter Rufinus' translation, Jerome produced his own translation of *First Principles*, which unfortunately, has not survived. Ironically, his translation was as biased as Rufinus' translation.

We will in **chapter four**, investigate a number of passages where Origen mentions transmigration. We will also discuss the reliability of Rufinus' and Jerome's translation of *First Principles* as well as Koetschau's reconstruction of it. Moreover, we will include scholarly opinion and their editorial policies which will help determine the proper way that we read Origen's view on transmigration. All of this will demonstrate that these passages do not support the neo-Gnostic contention that Origen embraced transmigration of souls.

Back to Origen

Because aspects of Origen's teaching are questionable, many consider him to be the most controversial figure in the development of early Christian eschatology.²⁴ Indeed, critics focus all too often on his speculative views and forget that he was acutely aware of the limitations of his own powers of reasoning. On several occasions he prefaced his thoughts with the words 'I think' or 'It is my opinion.'²⁵ Moreover, he admitted that views on preexistence of souls (*apokatastasis*)²⁶ and

²³ Ibid., 36.

²⁴ Brian E. Daley, S.J., *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.), 47.

²⁵ Ernest Leigh-Bennett, *Handbook of the Early Christian Fathers* (London: William & Norgate, 1920), 100,101.

²⁶ The term comes from the Greek, *apo*, 'back, again,' and *kathistemi*, 'to set in order.' The word literally means 'restoration' as seen in Acts 1: 6; 3:20,21; Matt. 17:10,11; and, Mark 9:11,12. While the Greek word is not used in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians (15:24-28), Origen based his view of *apokatastasis* primarily on these passages where Paul discusses at length the resurrection of the dead. See for example, *Arch* 3.5.7; 2.3.7; *HomJos* 1.16.91; *ComRm* 8.9. See

recurrent worlds belong to the area of philosophical and/or theological speculation, not certainty. Evidently, Origen did not intend to develop a systematic theory of the cosmos, as the subject was a matter of on-going investigation rather than strict definition.²⁷ While he did not have a well thought out and structured cosmology, it does appear that he integrated classical and contemporary philosophical thought with aspects of his own Christian belief.²⁸

Recent studies show that Origen's thinking centered on a particular vision of historical occurrences.²⁹ That is, he believed that history was both teleological and linear. He clearly distinguishes the Greek conception of time from the Judea-Christian conception of time. That is, Greek thought conceived time as cyclical, while Christian's view time as linear- there was a beginning and there will be an end. Origen sees time not as an abstraction but always in connection with the redemptive process.³⁰ Accordingly, Origen's philosophy of time differs significantly from the Neo-Platonist concept of emanation and return because he speaks of historical events (the creation, the fall, the writing of scripture, etc.), and they do not. As we will demonstrate later, the neo-Gnostic and Platonists notions of time are essentially abstractions of history.³¹

Many of Origen's doctrines hinge on his cosmology and ontology of time.³² For example, his assumption that the end is always like the beginning (*apokatastasis*) hinges on the restoration of an original harmony and unity in creation. Indeed, his theory of human origins balances God's goodness with human freedom.³³ While Origen's perception of *apokatastasis* is similar to the Greek or Stoic concept, his view differs significantly from theirs. Variations of it are evident in earlier Neo-platonic and Stoic cosmologies and in the teachings of Clement of Alexandria. Again, we demonstrate in our thesis that Origen's theory is derived from Christian theology rather than Greek philosophy.³⁴ His

also, André Méhat, 'Apocatastase': Origène, Clément d' Alexandrie, Act 33.21,' *VigChr* 10 (1956), 196-214.

27 *PArch* 1.6.1

28 Fiona Thompson, 'Cosmology' in *The Westminster*, 83.

29 See especially, P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007).

30 Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 54.

31 Jay Lampert, 'Origen on Time' in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 52, 3 (octobre 1996): 649-664.

32 P. Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen* (Bern, Frankfurt/New York, Paris: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 1991), 6-15.

33 Daley, *The Hope*, *ibid.*, 58.

34 *C Celsus* 8.72, (GCS 2.135.13 ff) as cited by John R. Sachs in his article 'Apokatastasis in Patristic Theology', *Theological Studies*, 54 (1993) 621.

rejection of the materialistic pantheism of the Stoics that re-absorbs all creatures into 'God,' is a prime example. The basis of Origen's theology rests on two guiding principles: the free will of man and the goodness of God.³⁵ From these principles, Origen conceives his idea of successive cycles of worlds. However, his theory was not intended to be doctrine³⁶ as Origen rejected the theory of an endless cycle of alternating falls and redemptions.³⁷ Rather, Origen's eschatological scheme culminates with the return of all rational creatures to the Creator. Hence, fallen souls along with the rest of the imperfect universe will once again be reconciled with the Creator, restored to their proper place and glory. Origen's eschatology, therefore, differs from Greek thought in that it has no dependency on transmigration. Indeed, Origen's doctrine of last things repudiates the necessity of successive embodiment's.

Origen rejected Greek and Gnostic notions of the afterlife as they embrace transmigration of souls, advance a recurrent worlds theory, and hold to a pantheistic idea of God and the universe. Rather, his entire theology is soteriologically driven. That is, his cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology, weave together to produce one outcome: the restoration of creation to its original place. This is the basis of Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis*. Moreover, Origen believed that God created all rational creatures that, because of free choice, fall and become souls receiving bodies corresponding to the gravity of their fall. After their bodies died, their soul underwent a period of punishment or purification in order to prepare for its encounter with God. This too, is part of the education of the soul, orchestrated by divine grace. While Origen struggled with the concept of divine punishment, he conceded that the duration of punishment depended on the level of purification needed. Some scholars argue that he subscribed to universal salvation that included the Devil and other fallen angels. However, we will demonstrate that this too is a misnomer as he states on several occasions, that salvation does not include the Devil.

Origen also believed in divine judgment and the resurrection of the dead. Again, some scholars accuse him of denying the resurrection because his view differed from the orthodox. However, we will demonstrate that while his interpretation is not identical to theirs, it is not a denial of it. Indeed, Origen goes to great lengths to defend the resurrection stating unequivocally that his desire was to find a mediating position between the orthodox and the Gnostic's. The orthodox accuse him of over-spiritualizing the resurrection body to the point of denying its materiality, while others accuse him of the opposite. Regardless, whether these differences are real or apparent, he always desired to be orthodox in his life and teaching. Most importantly, his notion of salvation and the afterlife disagrees with the prevailing Hellenistic notions of the afterlife. For this reason, we will in **chapter five**, explore

³⁵ Kelly, *Early Christian*, 474.

³⁶ *PArch*, I.6.2; 3.6. I, 3

³⁷ *ComRm* 5.10

the Greek and Gnostic views of salvation and the afterlife and contrast them with Origen's, so that there will be no doubt that his view differs from theirs. Ascertaining Origen's view of the afterlife requires that we investigate his extant writings as well as other sources having bearing on the subject. However, there are only a handful of Origen's extant writings, so we rely primarily on those translations mentioned above. Whether we can trust that these translations faithfully represent Origen's views on the afterlife and in particular, transmigration of souls is to be determined.

The Decisive Council of Constantinople (553)

Neo-Gnostic writers allege that the Second Council of Constantinople (C. 553) is the time and place in Church history where Christians excise reincarnation from the Bible. It is also the time and place where Origen is allegedly condemned for embracing preexistence of souls and by implication, reincarnation. Both of these allegations are baseless. Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate why they are false, we will review the events leading up to this council and then examine some of the more pertinent details of the proceedings. Accordingly, **chapter six** will address the more controversial aspects of Origen's theology that led to the first and second Origenist Crisis, discuss the attitudes of those who essentially add to or distort Origen (the *Origenist*), and of course, address the all-important question of *whom* or *what* is 'anathematized' at the Fifth General Council.

The development of early Christian belief before, during, and after Origen's death, is especially important, as his speculative teachings are the basis for the controversies in the first place. Indeed, the impact of Patristic Christology greatly influenced their conception of God. By the late second century, many Christians were convinced that Jesus was both human and divine. However, because it created the obvious dilemma of affirming only one God while confessing the deity of Christ, they had to reexamine their view of God. That is, they had to rethink both the theological idea of God and their philosophical idea of unity. The challenge of explaining the relationship of the Father to the Son engendered a series of philosophical and theological debates. Among other things, it sparked the famous Arian controversy and the Apollinarian debate. Accordingly, the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the second through fourth centuries cannot be overstated because they forced the early Christians to define their terms particularly at the great councils of Nicaea (C.E. 325), Constantinople (C.E. 381), Ephesus (c. 431), and, Chalcedon (c. 451). In fact, the decisions of these councils have direct bearing on the persons and writings condemned in 553.

The Fifth Ecumenical Council is essentially an extension of the earlier Origenist' controversies that take place some ten years earlier. At that time (543), the Emperor Justinian issued his edict against teachings ascribed to Origen. However, the Emperor had other matters to address. On the one hand, Pope Vigilius believes that Nestorianism³⁸ continues to influence the region through the writings

³⁸ The Christological view that Christ is conjointly two persons, one human-Jesus, and one divine (God's Logos), as

(referred to as the ‘Three Chapters’) of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa. On the other hand, the Monophysites³⁹ are growing in numbers in the region. This only serves to reinforce the division that exists between Christians in Syria and Egypt and those in the strictly Chalcedonian churches in the West. Under pressure by the Emperor, Pope Vigilius calls the Fifth Ecumenical Council in order reconcile these differences and thus bring stability to the empire. However, Justinian has already issued his *Judicatum* condemning the ‘Three Chapters’ in 548, so he issues a second edict in 551, condemning them again.

Contrary to the claims of the neo-Gnostics, the primary focus of the Fifth General Council was towards Monophysitism and the ‘Three Chapters,’ and not with Origen’s alleged belief in preexistence or reincarnation. Moreover, the anathemas were issued against the Origenist and their hyper-Origen views, and not against Origen.⁴⁰ This said, determining whether Origen was condemned for embracing reincarnation at this time, will require that we discuss the proceedings of the Fifth General Council in some detail.

Flawed Hermeneutics

Neo-Gnostic writers allege that while reincarnation is officially excised from the Bible in the sixth century, certain ‘vestiges’ of it are detectable. However, the slightest hint of reincarnation in the text contradicts their assertion that clerics removed it. That is, if reincarnation is detectable in the New Testament, the neo-Gnostic argument that clerics excised it in the sixth century implodes. Indeed, if they are correct, copies of New Testament manuscripts dating from the second through sixth centuries should include references to reincarnation. However, there is no evidence of reincarnation in any New Testament fragment or manuscript. Neo-Gnostics apparently want it both ways: on the one hand, because of its excision, reincarnation is not in the Bible; on the other hand, strains of it are still present in the text. Neither view is correct.

The neo-Gnostic errors do not depend entirely on whether clerics edit the Bible in the sixth century. Their errors are a result of their philosophical bias, which underlie their flawed hermeneutics. That is, their hermeneutical procedures reveal their basic philosophical preconceptions. They assume (because of their belief) that reincarnation is in the Bible and then set out to prove it. Of course, their reasoning is circular because it assumes what they are trying to prove. The neo-Gnostics commit the logical fallacy of ‘begging the question’ (*petitio principii*) or, to assume the correctness of the very conclusion opposed to two natures (True God, True Man).

39 The Christological view that Christ has only one nature (divine), as opposed to the Chalcedonian view that he has two natures, both human and divine, personally and inseparably united.

40 See for example, E.M. Harding, ‘Origenist Crises’ in *The Westminster*, 162-167, and Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: the Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

to be established.⁴¹ The neo-Gnostic methodology also fails to apply the basic hermeneutical principle - *Scripture interprets Scripture*- thus, ensuring in most instances, its own clarity (*perspicuity*).⁴² Moreover, where passages are obscure, isolated, or apparently contradictory, observing other normative rules of biblical interpretation takes into account other factors surrounding the text. Determining the intended audience, type of literary genre, the grammatical and syntactical aspects, historical background, and, of course, both the immediate and broader contexts of a passage all contribute toward a proper interpretation.⁴³ Nevertheless, reading something into the text (*eisegesis*) as the neo-Gnostics do, rather than drawing from the text (*exegesis*), is to create a *pretext* for heterodoxy. Religious cults and sects commit these same errors.⁴⁴

Origen is known for his excessive use of allegory and deep reservations about the historical meaning of biblical passages. However, while he sought the spiritual meaning behind the text, he was convinced that the historical passages outnumber those having spiritual meaning.⁴⁵ Indeed, Origen's use of allegory was the standard practice of the day. He believed that allegory allowed him to see 'the mystery of the Christian economy hidden beneath the veil of the literal text.'⁴⁶ That is, interpreting the Bible spiritually preserved the unity of the Old and New Testaments and pointed to the Christ-centric character of the Bible as a whole. Origen believed that this was the fundamental eschatological process.⁴⁷

While Origen's methodology influenced his speculative doctrines, he was not convinced that reincarnation was compatible with Christian faith. Moreover, it appears that the Origenist attempts to accommodate Platonism, resulted in the perversion of Origen's theology, and not with Origen.⁴⁸ Additionally, there is no evidence that Origen's approach to the Bible favored the anti-materialism of Platonism.⁴⁹ While some scholars are more sympathetic to Origen's hermeneutical principles,⁵⁰ attempts to compare his practice with the defective hermeneutical procedures of the neo-Gnostics are

41 Dauer, *Critical*, 261.

42 For a comprehensive study on the perspicuity of Scripture see, James P. Callahan, *The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press), 2001.

43 Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 17-73. See also, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: the Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

44 James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1980).

45 *PArch* 4.1.19

46 McGuckin, *The Westminster*, 49.

47 *Ibid.*, 50.

48 John J. O'Keefe, 'Scriptural Interpretation' in McGuckin, *ibid.*, 197.

unwarranted. Clearly, Origen's interpretation of Scripture refutes, among other things, their notion that he favored transmigration over resurrection or that he denied the finality of either heaven or hell. An examination of his writings bears this out.

Epistemological factors also affect Bible interpretation. Most Bible scholars admit that approaching a passage without bias, is not possible. Even Origen admits that the text of the Bible is subject to human error.⁵¹ This said most scholars would also agree that some degree of objectivity is possible. Otherwise, the very words used to communicate the Gospel message convey no meaning or significance. That is, words or concepts used to communicate something about a person, place, or thing, are meaningless apart from having some degree of certainty. Facts regarding persons, places, or things, mean something in a given context. On the other hand, if objectivity is not possible, hermeneutics is irrelevant and the Bible is open for any interpretation. Indeed, understanding the Bible becomes essentially a matter of personal opinion. However, it is feasible that the interpreter *transcend*, though not eliminate, certain points of reference.⁵² That is, while it is impossible to set aside all presuppositions, one may exercise a conscious *use* of them.⁵³ Suppressing personal bias while applying proper hermeneutical principles, will help discover the authorial intent of Scripture.⁵⁴

While there is much debate regarding the possibility of discovering the author's intention in a given text, we will argue that it is essential to understanding the meaning of the text. That is, what an author intended to communicate to the original audience and how they understood his words, has significant impact on the interpretation of Scripture.⁵⁵ Therefore, an informed hermeneutics helps ensure that a passage is correctly understood not solely through the lens of one's own theological or philosophical leaning. The neo-Gnostic practice of extracting reincarnation from a passage to prove that Christians embraced it, is a fundamental violation of basic hermeneutical principles. Indeed, the surest way to prove that Christians embraced reincarnation is to demonstrate that Christ and the Apostles taught it. However, there is no evidence in the Bible that they did. Despite this, neo-Gnostics intend to revise church history in order to prove that early Christians embraced reincarnation. Again, their

49 Ibid., 197.

50 See for example, Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible? Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, Vol. 1, (Leicester: Apollos, 1987), 49.

51 O'Keefe, 'Scriptural', 194.

52 Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words & Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 148.

53 Ibid., 148.

54 Ibid.

55 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 17-31.

philosophical assumptions underscore their pseudo-hermeneutic methodology.

Contrasting Worldviews

A cursory study of Christianity and neo-Gnosticism indicate that they are contrasting worldviews. Indeed, their core beliefs dramatically differ.⁵⁶ This is patently obvious when we compare karma⁵⁷ with the Christian doctrine of original sin.⁵⁸ The law of karma teaches that the deeds of every human being creates past, present, and future experiences in one's life.⁵⁹ While Karma accounts for the inequalities in a person's life and for the injustices in the world, a person's soul may migrate from one body to the next in order to pay its karmic debt and achieve 'salvation' or spiritual perfection. Neo-Gnostic soteriology is therefore auto-soteric or based on human achievement. Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that the injustices or moral deficiencies in the world are a result of sin affecting the human condition after the fall.⁶⁰ Moreover, sin originates with Satan; he seduces the first humans to sin against their Creator.⁶¹ The biblical concept of original sin contradicts karmic theory, teaching rather, that humans share Adam's sin and therefore inherit his corrupt nature.⁶² Indeed, an infinite series of rebirths cannot remedy the fallen condition that separates humans from the Creator. It is treatable solely by Christ's birth, death, and resurrection.⁶³ Grace and mercy therefore, are the basis of biblical soteriology, not human achievement.⁶⁴ Additionally, while neo-Gnostic soteriology makes no provision *for* saving the body, Christian soteriology does. The Apostle Paul argues that salvation hinges on Christ's bodily resurrection, which guarantees that all Christian's will experience a resurrection similar

⁵⁶ John A. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 168.

⁵⁷ From the Sanskrit word *kārman* which literally means 'deed' or 'action' and refers to '...an ethically oriented causal law.' Ninian Smart, 'Karma' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed., Vol.3 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & the Free Press, 1967), 325, 326.

⁵⁸ In Christian theology, this refers to the 'state of sin in which humankind has been held captive since the fall.' Cross, *Dictionary*, *ibid.*, 994.

⁵⁹ Smart, *The Encyclopedia*, 325.

⁶⁰ Romans 5: 12-21

⁶¹ Matthew 15:19; John 8: 44

⁶² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 656.

⁶³ Mark 10:45; Luke 2:38; 24:21; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Galatians 3:13; 4:5

⁶⁴ Ephesians 2: 8, 9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3: 5-7

to his.⁶⁵

Most Eastern-based religion assert that the soul eternally emanates from the essence or being of God. However, the biblical doctrine of creation teaches that God created the universe out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*) and that human souls are the result of special or immediate creation. The soul therefore, is not eternal nor does it emanate from the mind or essence of God. Indeed, God not only creates the soul, he also coordinates its dependence upon the one earthy body in the future resurrection.⁶⁶ Moreover, Christianity teaches that while God is immanent and transcendent, he is distinct from creation, not part of it.⁶⁷ While the Creator is present and active in his own creation, he is superior to and independent of it.⁶⁸ In the pantheistic worldview of neo-Gnosticism, there are no ontological distinctions between God and creation, which means that suffering, death, and evil are identical with his being or essence, just as the soul is. God, is therefore the author of evil, and human souls are as infinitely corrupt as he is. Additionally, an impersonal, undifferentiated force or power has no capacity to determine or save anyone. Indeed, the idea that karma explains the existence of evil and suffering only has meaning for those who deny a personal, loving God. Accordingly, the neo-Gnostic notion of saving the soul does not compare to the personal, loving God of Judaeo-Christianity who in the Incarnation, save fallen souls. That is, Christian redemption rests on the idea that Jesus Christ died on a cross to save sinners.

Another myth advanced by the neo-Gnostics is that one can embrace reincarnation and be a Christian. However, their attempts to reconcile neo-Gnosticism with Christianity are illusory or semantically based.⁶⁹ That is, Christians reject reincarnation for a number of reasons. First, Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and the early fathers' all reject reincarnation. Second, both the Old and New Testaments refute the doctrine of reincarnation. Third, there is no evidence that any Church council regards reincarnation as an official church teaching. Fourth, there is no evidence that early believers embraced reincarnation. The assertion therefore, that reincarnation affirms '...repeated resurrections of a particular kind,' is unsustainable.⁷⁰ Fifth, the concepts of reincarnation and resurrection are essentially antithetical.⁷¹ As we will demonstrate, by definition, they are mutually exclusive in that they are unable

⁶⁵ Philippians 3:20, 21; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

⁶⁶ John 5: 28, 29; 11:25, 26; I Corinthians 15

⁶⁷ Erickson, *Christian*, 15.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ For example, Geddes MacGregor, Quincy Howe Jr., Frederick Spencer, and, Rudolf Frieling. See, Norman L. Geisler & J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 42-56.

⁷⁰ John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 372.

⁷¹ Geisler & Amano, *The Reincarnation*, *ibid.*, 148-152

to be true at the same time in the same sense. Reincarnation is defined as the successive embodiment of the soul in a series of mortal bodies, whereas the resurrection is defined as the reuniting of the soul to one mortal, transformed body, in a glorified immortal state.⁷² When understood in their proper context, these two states are wholly different and unrelated. While Christians debated the meaning of the word ‘flesh’ as stated in the Apostles Creed,⁷³ inferring that resurrection means reincarnation is to confuse the two terms. Indeed, there is no semantic ambiguity between them. Again, no Christian creed or confession mentions reincarnation.⁷⁴

Studying Origen Holistically

Origen remains one of the most controversial figures in Church history for allegedly embracing such doctrines as the preexistence of souls, universalism, and subordinationism. His excessive use of allegory and tendency to speculate beyond the boundaries of Scripture, often invited sharp criticism. His emphasis on the spiritualization of the resurrection body is undeniable. As well, his Christology may have influenced the Arian heresy. However, accusing him of Platonism because he borrowed Greek terms to explain Christian doctrine or to call him a reincarnationist because he embraced preexistence of souls, is inaccurate. As we will demonstrate, most criticism leveled against him are unfair and biased. Indeed, much of the criticism is based on faulty interpretations of isolated texts, and not on the broader context of his teachings.⁷⁵ Point of fact, while scholars disagree as to the degree Greek philosophy influenced him, recent studies show that Origen’s views actually counter Platonist ideas.⁷⁶

His reasons for allegory, while excessive, are no different from others at that time. Even then, his interpretation of the Scriptures indicate that he has no interest in transmigration. Moreover, his Christology repudiates the Arian assertion that there was a time when the Logos did not exist.⁷⁷ Indeed, Origen is more of a systematic theologian than a biblical scholar in that his focus is always on the Scriptures. That is, he was determined to discover the divine truths of Scripture in order to present

⁷² 1 Corinthians 15: 51-57; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

⁷³ Lynn Elvin Boliek, *The Resurrection of the Flesh: A Study of a Confessional Phrase* (Amsterdam: Drukkerij En Uitgeverij Jacob Van Campen, 1962).

⁷⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (Yale University Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ Crouzel, *Origen*, 233

⁷⁶ Ibid, 161.

⁷⁷ *ComHe* 1.8

Christ to his audience. Therefore, studying Origen means that one should critically evaluate not only his opinions, but investigate the doctrines that express his deeply held Christian belief.⁷⁸ As a result, one will discover that he resisted the urge to assimilate pagan thought with Christian belief and remains devoted to the Scriptures and to the Rule of Faith.

Finally, it is essential that an investigation of Origen includes an examination of whom or what circumstances influenced him in the broader context of his life. We can get a sense of this by examining both the extant writings⁷⁹ and those materials preserved in Latin translations.⁸⁰ Only then, can we reasonably conclude that his views on cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology, preclude any notion of reincarnation.

⁷⁸ Edwards, 6.

⁷⁹ 'The Origenist Controversies caused most of the literary output of Origen to disappear and the complete list of his writings that Eusebius added to the biography of his friend and teacher Pamphilus was lost. Even at that, the remains of Origen's writings are mostly preserved not in the original Greek, but in Latin translations.' Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*, Vol. 2, (Utrecht Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1953), 43.

⁸⁰ Henri Crouzel has argued this point repeatedly. See, *Origen*, *ibid.*, 48, 49; 163-179.

CHAPTER 1

THE NEO-GNOSTIC CASE FOR “CHRISTIAN REINCARNATIONISM”

Before we examine the question of the early fathers and reincarnation, we need to first identify contemporary neo-Gnostics, explore how their opinion forms, and examine why and how it gained modern support.

The neo-Gnostic position on Origen and the early fathers’ rests ultimately on their assumptions regarding the subject of reincarnation. Modern proponents of reincarnation justify it on moral grounds. Others argue its validity based on observations gained from psychical research. Some scholars argue that specific historical events in early Christianity, implicitly supports belief in reincarnation. Finally, as in the case of the neo-Gnostics, doctrines such as karma and reincarnation are at the core of their metaphysical worldview, influencing their approach to biblical and/or theological truths in Scripture. This said, our study will not include an investigation of the moral implications of reincarnation nor will it include a discussion of the impact of psychical research on the subject. Neither approach contributes to Origen’s attitude on reincarnation and therefore have no bearing on our thesis..

We are primarily interested in the historical and theological implications of the neo-Gnostic position, as they have direct bearing on Origen and on the broader focus of our thesis. Indeed, we will examine the neo-Gnostic case in order to ascertain whether Origen believed in or denied reincarnation. Theories in modern times are traced to the Theosophical and Rosicrucian schools of thought, around the turn of the 20th century.⁸¹ Notable followers of Theosophy and Rosicrucianism include among others, Geddes MacGregor, Quincy Howe, Jr., William De Artega, I.M. Oderberg, Joseph Head, and Sylvia L. Cranston. All of these individuals have advanced popular and/or scholarly cases for “Christian reincarnationism”. We will therefore trace its earliest proponents to the modern era and then present their justification for holding such a position.

The neo-Gnostic position rests on three basic assumptions: 1. Jesus Christ and the Apostles teach reincarnation; 2. The early Church fathers’ taught reincarnation until it was excised from the Bible in 553 A.D.; and, 3. Origen’s culture influenced him to the extent that he incorporated reincarnation in his own life and teachings.

Assumption One: Jesus Christ and the Apostles taught Reincarnation

The obvious place where neo-Gnostics go to prove that Jesus and the Apostles taught reincarnation,

⁸¹ For example, see Manly P. Hall’s Bibliography (191-198) in *Reincarnation: the Cycle of Necessity*, The Philosophers Press, Los Angeles, CA 1939, and E.D. Walker’s *Reincarnation: A Study of Forgotten Truth* University Books, New Hyde Park, NY 1965, 353-369.

is in the New Testament. As we discuss later, all neo-Gnostics appeal essentially to the same biblical passages for proof of reincarnation. For example, Manly P. Hall argues that while the New Testament suffers from mistranslation and interpolation, there are still vestiges of *metempsychosis* still present in the text.⁸² However, he concedes that there is really only one clear reference to reincarnation in both the Old and New Testaments, namely, Revelation 3:12: “To him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more.” Hall interprets this to mean that those who fail in life must return to the corporeal state,⁸³ while those who achieve their goal return to God where they become “pillars, uprights, and supporters, the living columns in the everlasting house...”⁸⁴ Despite any corroborating evidence, Hall maintains that an extensive survey of early Christianity reveals, that Jesus taught reincarnation just as others did before him.⁸⁵

Similarly, F. Homer Curtiss argues that to say that the New Testament does not teach reincarnation is to ignore Jesus’ words as well as other passages that imply reincarnation.⁸⁶ Curtiss believes that the obvious passages are those where Jesus states that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah.⁸⁷ John’s own followers understood these statements to mean that John was a prophet who had been reincarnated.⁸⁸ The fact that John denies that he is Elijah (John 1:21) is irrelevant, as it only proves that one does not remember one’s past incarnations.⁸⁹ Curtiss also maintains that when Jesus asks the disciples to identify him, they immediately think of reincarnation.⁹⁰ Additionally, John 9 speaks of a man born blind. Curtiss suggests that this is proof of reincarnation as evidenced by the disciple’s response.⁹¹ Matthew 16:17 also implies reincarnation, since, according to Curtiss, Jesus’ reference to Simon as “Simon Bar-Jonah,” affirms Peter’s previous incarnation as Jonah.⁹²

82 Hall, *ibid.*, 71.

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*, 76.

86 Curtiss, Homer F. *Reincarnation*, Santa Barbara, CA: J.F. Rowny, 39.

87 *Ibid.*, 40.

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*, 41.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*

92 *Ibid.*

Curtiss also cites John 3: 10, “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” as proof of reincarnation.⁹³ The passage goes on to demonstrate Jesus’ astonishment of Nicodemus’ ignorance of reincarnation, which leads him to question whether he was in fact, qualified to teach Jewish doctrine.⁹⁴

Matthew 12: 41- 42 reflect the Old Testament narrative regarding Jonah’s motive for preaching to the Ninevites. Curtiss contends that if it is not understood in terms of reincarnation, the passage is unclear:

How is it possible for the men of Nineveh to rise and condemn that generation unless they were again in incarnation, as was also Jonah as Peter?⁹⁵

Curtiss appeals to other New Testament passages for proof of reincarnation. For example, he interprets Luke 20: 35, 36, “...those who have arrived or obtained full Mastery will be accounted worthy to obtain the next world, and the resurrection from the dead” to mean cessation from the necessity of reincarnating.⁹⁶ He also argues that the phrase, “...goings forth from old from everlasting...” (Micah 5:2, 3) is alluded to in Acts 15:16, and suggestive of Christ’ multiple incarnations.⁹⁷ The phrase, “overcoming of the saints” in the Book of Revelation (3:12), is considered by Curtiss to be a reference the believer’s final incarnation. Additionally, the phrase “...he shall no longer go out,” mentioned in the same book and chapter means that one no longer needs to descend into incarnation again.⁹⁸

Finally, Curtiss cites John 8: 58 where Jesus states ‘Before Abraham was, I am,’ as further proof of reincarnation. In this passage Jesus states that he existed before Abraham. Curtiss argues therefore that this a clear reference to Jesus’ own teaching on reincarnation as assumed in all of his general teachings.⁹⁹

The classic neo-Gnostic authority on reincarnation is *Reincarnation: an East-West Anthology* by Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston.¹⁰⁰ Their work is essentially a compilation of quotations from the world’s religions and western thinkers on reincarnation. In their chapter on Christianity, the authors

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 43, 44.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid., 44.

present passages in the New Testament that they believe supports reincarnation. Head and Cranston argue that the ancient Jews were always expecting the reincarnation of their prophets and that their Messiah would be the incarnation of Adam himself, who has already come a second time as David.¹⁰¹ They also argue that the prophecy in Malachi 4: 5 and cited in Matthew 16:13, 14 is a fulfilled of the person of John the Baptist and sure proof of reincarnation. That the disciples understood that Jesus referred to John the Baptist as the reincarnation of Elijah, is obvious to these Head and Cranston.¹⁰²

Cranston and Head also cite John 9:34 as further proof of reincarnation. Here again, is a reference to the story of the man born blind and the presumption of a previous life. While the authors implicate Jesus for failing to deny or affirm reincarnation, they admit that his explanation for the man's blindness is for another reason.¹⁰³ Despite this, Head and Cranston maintain that John 1:6 implies the existence of John's soul before his body.¹⁰⁴

Head and Cranston cite other New Testament passages for proof of reincarnation. For example, Romans 9:10-13 speaks of God's love for Jacob and his rejection of Esau before they were born.¹⁰⁵ Then, Revelation 3:12 is adduced as proof of reincarnation. This passage, they argue, speaks of the exile of the soul, its need for purification, and the necessity for multiple incarnations before admission into heaven.¹⁰⁶

Quincy Howe Jr., a noted neo-Gnostic scholar, admits that while scriptural support for reincarnation is illusive, the New Testament contains numerous passages that are compatible with it¹⁰⁷ Moreover, contemporary biblical scholarship maintains that both Jesus and John the Baptist accepted reincarnation because of their association with the Essenes.¹⁰⁸ Howe also contends that if there are references to reincarnation in the Gospels, they originate not from the evangelists, but probably to an earlier tradition

100 Head, Joseph and Cranston, S.I. *Reincarnation an East-West Anthology*, Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1961.

101 Ibid., 32.

102 Ibid., 33.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 34.

106 Ibid.

107 Howe, Quincy Jr. *Reincarnation for the Christian*, Wheaton, ILL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 85.

108 Ibid., 88.

or possibly from Jesus himself.¹⁰⁹ Howe also admits that while the Gospel writers seemed to oppose reincarnation, they recorded Jesus' teachings on the subject even though they did not understand the ramifications of what they meant at the time.

While Howe questions whether the Scriptures provide any direct references to reincarnation from Jesus himself, as with other neo-Gnostics, he appeals to John 9:34 for proof of reincarnation. He argues that the man's blindness is a result of sins committed in a prenatal existence and demonstrates "...incontrovertible support for a doctrine of human preexistence."¹¹⁰ However, because Jesus neglected to say anything against preexistence, is further evidence that he and the disciples accepted it.¹¹¹ Howe believes that this is the most persuasive passage in the New Testament supporting Jesus' and the disciple's acceptance of reincarnation.¹¹²

Howe also discusses Matthew 11: 13, 14 where Jesus explains the relationship of Elijah to John the Baptist to the disciples. Howe assumes that the passage contains a clear statement of preexistence and thus, reincarnation:

If one accepts the messianic forerunner as a preexistence type of whom Elijah and John are both incarnations, then it is clear that John comes...in the direct, palpable, incarnate reappearance of Elijah.¹¹³

Howe argues that Jesus' acknowledgment of John the Baptist as a spiritual and literal incarnation of Elijah is indisputable. However, he concedes that while implicit support for reincarnation exists in the New Testament, it falls short due to the lack of interest in prenatal and postmortem considerations related to one's life.¹¹⁴ That said, Howe maintains that additional passages such as Ephesians 1:4 and Revelation 3:12, should be considered in the broader study of reincarnation and the New Testament.¹¹⁵

New Age author, Steven Rosen, argues that a number of biblical scholar's claim that before the Book of Revelation, the doctrine of reincarnation existed in the "unexpurgated" Bible.¹¹⁶ Moreover,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 93.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 94.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Rosen, Steven. *The Reincarnation Controversy*. Badger, CA: Torchlight Publishing, Inc., 1997, 70.

prominent authorities in the Church as well as reputable Christian scholars all agree that early Christianity “... may have favored the doctrine of rebirth over that of both resurrection or the existential finality of heaven or hell.”¹¹⁷ Rosen maintains that scholars such as Leslie Weatherhead, William de Artega, John Hick, Geddes MacGregor, Quincy Howe, Jr., and Edgar Cayce, all concede this point.¹¹⁸

Rosen’s discussion of reincarnation repeats much of what other neo-Gnostics have already claimed. Nevertheless, his argument for New Testament support of reincarnation points to the Malachi’s prophecy regarding the “re-appearance” of Elijah. Because this passage predicts the re-appearance of Elijah some four hundred years after Elijah lived, Rosen contends that it is proof of reincarnation.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Matthew proves that Elijah reincarnates in the person of John the Baptist.¹²⁰ Rosen argues further that while John denies that he is Elijah, he is simply unaware of his previous existence.¹²¹

As other neo-Gnostics do, Rosen cites John 9: 2 as proof of reincarnation. This passage centers on the question of why a man is born blind and whether Jesus and the disciples embraced preexistence and reincarnation. Rosen argues that Jesus and the disciples understood implicitly that the condition of the blind man results from a bodily existence prior to his birth.¹²² Moreover, the fact that Jesus fails to mention or deny transmigration is proof that it is not contrary to biblical teaching.¹²³

Rosen appeals to other New Testament passages for proof of reincarnation. For example, Romans 9: 10-13 speaks of God’s partiality regarding Jacob and Esau, Rosen argues that that it is not possible to love or hate a being prior to his or her coming into existence. According to Rosen, it is illogical to love or hate someone before they were born unless they existed in a previous life.¹²⁴ Moreover, according to Galatians 6:7, one life is not adequate to reap all that one sows. Rosen therefore argues that the karmic or causal responsibilities of one’s actions assumes reincarnation theory.¹²⁵

Rosen finally appeals to Revelation 13:10 for support of reincarnation. It states in essence that the one who kills by the sword will die by the sword. While most scholars interpret the passage

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 74.

¹²² Ibid., 75.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 76,77.

metaphorically, Rosen argues, that it is a reference to cause and effect as explained in karma and reincarnation.¹²⁶

Another popular neo-Gnostic author is Elizabeth Clare Prophet. Her book *Reincarnation: the Missing Link in Christianity* provides a series of proofs for reincarnation in the New Testament. Her rationale begins with the following assumption:

Some New Testament passages imply reincarnation. Others seem to teach the opposite- that we have only one life to live...[and] many scholars think that the passages that imply reincarnation represent the Gospel writer's views rather than Jesus' teachings.¹²⁷

Prophet believes that the focus of the debate centers on the passages that say that John the Baptist is the reincarnation of Elijah.¹²⁸ She therefore argues that the Apostle John demonstrated that John the Baptist was Elijah reincarnated and that he “preformed the prophesied role of messenger of the Lord and preparer of the way.”¹²⁹ This said, Prophet asserts that it really doesn't matter whether Jesus or the disciples refer to John as Elijah, as it does not disprove that early Christians believed in reincarnation.¹³⁰

Prophet also appeals to the story of the man born blind in John's Gospel as proof of reincarnation. She suggests that there are two possible explanations as to why people are born different: one, people suffer for their parent's transgressions or, two; people suffer for their own sins. The fact that John includes the second explanation is proof that reincarnation is a legitimate option.¹³¹ Moreover, Prophet believes that Jesus would not have entertained the question of whether the man's sins caused him to be born blind unless he believed the man had had a previous existence.¹³² Consequently, Prophet believes that reincarnation is evident in early Christianity.¹³³

Prophet maintains that references in the New Testament that imply an immediate presence in heaven

126 Ibid.

127 Prophet, Elizabeth Clare. *Reincarnation: The Missing Link in Christianity*. Corwin Springs, MT: Summit University Press, 1997, 96.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid., 99.

130 Ibid., 101.

131 Ibid., 102.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid., 103.

or hell, do not contradict the reincarnation position. To prove her point she cites Luke 23:41-43 where Jesus assures the repentant criminal, “I promise you, today you will be with me in Paradise,” and Luke 19-23, where Jesus shares a parable concerning the destiny of a rich man and a poor man immediately after death. According to the parable, the rich man dies and goes to hell while the poor man dies and goes to a place called Paradise. While Prophet doubts that Jesus actually spoke the parable, she admits that it makes no difference as neither passage denies or affirms reincarnation.¹³⁴ That is, Jesus refers to two different states that the soul may enter: one, a good state, heaven, and the other, a bad state, hell; transition points between incarnations on earth.¹³⁵ Prophet is convinced that Luke borrowed concepts about heaven and hell from the Greeks in that his view essentially agrees with theirs.¹³⁶

Prophet argues that while Hebrews 9: 27, 28 seem to oppose reincarnation, the immediate context does not deny it.¹³⁷ Therefore, the statement, “...men only die once,” does not preclude the possibility of the soul’s returning to earth in another mortal body.¹³⁸ Moreover, according to Prophet, the phrase, “once to die” refers to the “...carnal mind, the human ego, not to the mortal body.”¹³⁹

Prophet’s assessment of the New Testament and reincarnation ends with a series of affirmations:

First, there is no record either in the Gospels, the writings of the Apostles, the Book of Revelation, or the Gnostic texts- of Jesus denying reincarnation. Second, reincarnation is clearly mentioned in the New Testament and hence was a valid part of some forms of early Christianity. Third, it [reincarnation] is implied in both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁴⁰

Geddes MacGregor argues that one should not begin their investigation of reincarnation and the New Testament by looking for texts that prove it but rather, one should explore whether or not reincarnation is on the minds of the biblical writers.¹⁴¹ The man born blind from birth recorded in John 9: 34 illustrates his point. MacGregor offers two possible explanations for the man’s condition: one,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 104.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 107.

¹⁴¹ MacGregor, Geddes. *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Nobel Books, 42.

“...his parents or other ancestors had sinned and had transmitted the consequences of their sin to the child in the form of congenital blindness, or two, the man himself, before his birth, had sinned in some way that had resulted in this terrible misfortune.”¹⁴² The second explanation according to MacGregor, presupposes a previous life in which the sin had occurred. Additionally, and to his point, the fact that Jesus ignores the implications of reincarnation in this situation is more indicative of the mindset of the disciples than his. MacGregor believes that their attitude was no different from the religious thinking that was common in the culture of that time.¹⁴³

MacGregor ends his discussion of reincarnation and the New Testament by pointing to a passage in Malachi predicting the return of Elijah in the person of John the Baptist. The account is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus tells the disciples that John the Baptist is the return of Elijah.¹⁴⁴ While Jesus adds no further detail to his statement, MacGregor insists that the disciples assume reincarnation.¹⁴⁵

MacGregor admits that while reincarnation is unclear in some passages, it is because the biblical writers intentionally avoid making certain metaphysical or ontological claims. Additionally, the evidence appears to indicate that they understood transmigration ideas and have some interest in them.¹⁴⁶

Herbert Bruce Puryear, a clinical psychologist and author of several New Age books, published a lengthy study on reincarnation entitled, *Why Jesus Taught Reincarnation: A Better News Gospel*.¹⁴⁷ Puryear’s basic premise is that the incarnation of Christ is essentially no different from other human beings. That is, Jesus’ incarnation alludes to the preexistence, incarnation, and divine nature of all human beings.¹⁴⁸ John 10:34 makes this abundantly clear when Jesus states, “You are gods.” According to Puryear, Jesus’ question to his disciples regarding his identity presumes reincarnation.¹⁴⁹ That is, their attitude is in keeping with the widely held and viable concept at that time.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Jesus’

¹⁴² Ibid., 43.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 16:13

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., *Reincarnation as a Christian*, 44.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴⁷ Puryear, Herbert Bruce. *Why Jesus Taught Reincarnation*. Scottsdale, AZ: New Paradigm Press, 1992.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

teachings were fundamentally associated with reincarnation.¹⁵¹ Puyear therefore asserts that to argue against reincarnation is to depict Christianity as a religion where God is arbitrarily unloving and unforgiving toward unbelievers.¹⁵² Puyear believes that reincarnation does just the opposite: it elevates the Gospel from an elitist's religious system to one that identifies with common human souls.¹⁵³

Puyear's proof for reincarnation in the Bible is based on two assumptions: first, Jesus taught reincarnation, and second, the basic nature of humankind demands it.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, the Bible contains both direct and indirect references to reincarnation.¹⁵⁵ For example, both Malachi 4:5 and Matthew 16: 13 affirm the return of Elijah as John the Baptist and therefore prove together, that Jesus taught reincarnation.¹⁵⁶ Puyear believed that these verses clearly assume reincarnation.¹⁵⁷

Puyear maintains that some Christians reject reincarnation because they are unwilling to face personal problems in order to achieve the promise of divinity and choose instead, to take an easy path to salvation. Moreover, Christians view humanity as flawed in that it sees humans as creatures instead of spiritual beings. Indeed, Puyear believed that Orthodoxy was opposed to both the divine nature of humankind and reincarnation.¹⁵⁸ He suggests that there are several other reasons for the absence of reincarnation in orthodox Christianity:

One, Christian's have defined God theologically as transcendent, distinguishing Him from us in a way that it makes humankind as finite creatures rather than part of the divine. Two, reincarnation detracts from the Gospel message that has as its central focus, the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Third, Church leaders wish to retain political and personal power over the masses which in turn controls the destiny of their souls. Reincarnation disqualifies that control. Fourth, individuals and groups are inclined toward elitism and exclusiveness while reincarnation relatives any sense of superiority- all souls will achieve oneness with the Divine no matter their status. Fifth, the body is an incarnation of the soul; an extension of the pattern that has been previously built in the mental body of the soul. Sixth, Christianity misunderstands or lacks an awareness regarding

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid., 3.

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid., 7.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid., 8.

158 Ibid., 9.

the measureless reaches of the unconscious. The idea that one must believe and be saved is too simple in the greater context of the human condition. Seventh, there is vast ignorance about the real implications of reincarnation especially in the true context of Jesus' teachings. Eighth, there is vast ignorance about the universal laws of karma. Ninth, there exists much ignorance regarding the facts of human experience and reincarnation. That is, some people testify to past lives despite their disbelief in reincarnation.¹⁵⁹

Finally, Puryear argues that the absence of reincarnation in orthodox Christianity today is because Christians ignore the extensive research supporting reincarnation. That is, they are unwilling to examine the facts and allow truth to prevail even over their theological bias.¹⁶⁰

Leslie Weatherhead, a noted authority on New Age metaphysics, has written several books on the subject of reincarnation and the afterlife. In his book, *The Christian Agnostic*, he argues that if belief in reincarnation appears to contradict an *essential* (emphasis, his) teaching in Christianity, one is obligated to further investigate the subject before arriving at any conclusion.¹⁶¹ While John 9:2 is too compelling to disprove preexistence, it does not affirm or deny reincarnation. Moreover, it is not assumed in Matthew 16:15 where Jesus' question to his disciples regarding his identity, goes unchallenged.¹⁶²

Weatherhead admits that while these passages cannot prove reincarnation with absolute certainty, the evidence indicates that Jesus never denied it and that it is compatible with his teachings.¹⁶³ Despite the lack of empirical evidence, Weatherhead insists that the case for reincarnation and its cumulative effect over time is undeniable.¹⁶⁴

Richard Henry Drummond, a noted authority on comparative religions, suggests that as early as the second century, Jewish Christian sects believed that prior to his birth in Palestine, "Jesus was manifested in a variety of forms and names on numerous occasions."¹⁶⁵ This said, we gain nothing as

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Weatherhead, Leslie D. *The Christian Agnostic*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 294.

¹⁶² Ibid., 295.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 296.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Drummond, Richard Henry. *A Broader Vision: Perspectives on the Buddha and the Christ*. Virginia Beach, VA: A.R.E. Press, 81. See Part II, footnote 20, where Drummond refers to Pseudo-Clementine, *Homilies* III, 20. Here Drummond argues that the concept of Jesus' prior incarnations are evident in Manichaeism and Mandaean teachings and in certain forms of Islamic faith. Thus, "...According to the Homilies, the one who became Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, had been incarnated as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and lastly, Jesus." Drummond adds: "...if we are to take seriously this Jewish-Christian affirmation of Jesus as Adam...there is strong reason to believe that in his final incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, as the Christ, he had become quite without sin." See footnote 20, 267.

the bulk of Drummond's study centers on similarities between Buddha and Christ and briefly on Origen and reincarnation.

Eva Martin's work simply lists a series of passages in the New Testament and offers no explanation as to why they support reincarnation.¹⁶⁶

Neo-Gnostics consider E.D. Walker's *Reincarnation: A Study of Forgotten Truth*, primary source material for proof of reincarnation.¹⁶⁷ By all accounts, this book is the first extensive work on reincarnation in the Western world. Since its first publication in 1888, it has undergone several editions and has as its stated goal (as the dust cover asserts), "to dispel the negative connotations surrounding Christianity and reincarnation and to demonstrate that it is compatible with Christian doctrine and belief."¹⁶⁸ Walker's *Introduction* suggests that the concepts of reincarnation and preexistence are present even in Christianity.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, where the Bible alludes to it, it generally speaks of preexistence and has no bearing on redemption.¹⁷⁰ Walker believed that proof for reincarnation does not depend solely upon scriptural support.¹⁷¹

Walker argues that the idea of reincarnation was common among the Pharisees and illustrated in the Gospels where, in one instance (John 9:34), Jesus and the disciples encounter a man born blind. Accordingly, Jesus suggests to his disciple's two possible explanations for the man's condition: it was an affirmation of Moses teachings regarding the sins of the fathers descending on the children of the third and fourth generations, or, it was as a result of reincarnation.¹⁷² Walker believes that Jesus' vague response as to why the man is born blind is not a denial of reincarnation as he (Jesus) affirms it in other passages.¹⁷³ For example, Jesus repeatedly states that John the Baptist is a reincarnation of Elijah.¹⁷⁴ The passage in *John* 1:6 appears to imply that John the Baptist's soul exists before his body.¹⁷⁵ Finally, Revelation 3: 12 suggests that reincarnation is the aspiration of every believer. It reads, "Him that

¹⁶⁶ Martin, Eva. *Reincarnation: the Ring of Return*, New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 71.

¹⁶⁷ Walker, E.D. *Reincarnation: A Study of Forgotten Truth*. New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, Inc., 1965.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 4-6.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 193.

¹⁷² Ibid., 196.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 198.

overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out”¹⁷⁶

Walker ends his discussion of the subject asserting that while scriptural evidence proves reincarnation, it is essentially the “...tone of the Scriptures that trumps everything.”¹⁷⁷

As we have indicated, neo-Gnostic authors generally rely on the same literature and cite the same biblical passages for proof of reincarnation. Let us therefore address the second major assumption by neo-Gnostic authors. Namely, the early church fathers embraced reincarnation until its excision from the Bible in 553 at the Council of Constantinople.

Assumption Two: the Early Church Fathers’ Embraced Reincarnation until its Excision from the Bible at the Council of Constantinople in 553

With few exceptions, neo-Gnostic authors claim that the vast number of early fathers’ embraced reincarnation until its excision from the Bible at the Council of Constantinople in 553. The focus for its removal centers primarily on Origen, the alleged object of condemnation at this council. The neo-Gnostics argue that Origen was condemned at this council for belief in preexistence of souls and by implication, reincarnation. However, we will argue in our study that it was the Origenist who were condemned at this council, not Origen, since it will be shown that he considers reincarnation to be incompatible with Christian belief. Despite this, neo-Gnostics cite the early fathers’ as *prima facie* evidence for proof of reincarnation in early Christianity.

Neo-Gnostic references to Origen, the Fifth General Council, and reincarnation are found largely in New Age publications. Thus their position on reincarnation and Christianity depends primarily on modern sources and not on the basis of historical facts. For example, Manly P. Hall’s *Reincarnation: the Cycle of Necessity*, maintains that it is common for pagan converts to Christianity to embrace some form of reincarnation.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, reincarnation was widely held until clerics discovered that its philosophy opposed their power and control over the masses. Hall argues that this tension culminated with the questioning of the more speculative aspects of Origen’s teachings. As a result, the concept of reincarnation (*metempsychosis*) diminished to the point that Christianity finally rejected it.¹⁷⁹

Hall cites other church authorities to prove reincarnation. For example, Augustine asks, “Did I not live in another body, or somewhere else, before entering my mother’s womb?”¹⁸⁰ Jerome declares,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Hall, Manly P. *Reincarnation: the Cycle of Necessity*. Los Angeles, CA: The Philosophers Press, 77.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁸⁰ *Confessions* 1:6

“...the doctrine of transmigration was taught as an esoteric mystery in the early church...”¹⁸¹ And, according to Rufinus, “...a letter exists by St. Athanasius in which he definitely states his belief in preexistence and intimates an acceptance of reincarnation.”¹⁸² Nemesius, bishop of Emissa, stated that the Greek Christians accept transmigration.¹⁸³ Additionally, Arnobius, a Numidian apologist of Christianity, implies reincarnation in his statement, “We die many times, and often do we rise from the dead.”¹⁸⁴ Finally, Arnobius left a record of Clement of Alexandria’s account of metempsychosis where he [Clement] affirms reincarnation as “...transmitted by tradition and authorized by St. Paul himself.”¹⁸⁵

Hall also argues that Justin Martyr affirms reincarnation in his statement, “...the soul of man occupies a human body on more than one occasion.”¹⁸⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa also embraces reincarnation as indicated in his statement, “It is absolutely necessary that the soul should be healed and purified, and if this does not take place during its life on earth, it must be accomplished in future lives.”¹⁸⁷ Hall argues that while this passage speaks of life in a future state, it probably infers metempsychosis.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, Synesius’ thesis on dreams is an allusion to reincarnation: “It is possible by labor and times, and a transition into other lives, for the imaginative soul, to emerge from this dark abode,”¹⁸⁹

Most importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, Hall cites Origen’s *Contra Celsum* for proof of reincarnation:

Is it not more in conformity with reason that every soul for certain mysterious reasons (I speak now according to the opinion of Pythagoras and Plato and Empedocles, who Celsus frequently names) is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions?¹⁹⁰

181 Hieronim, *Epistola ad Demetr.*, as cited by Hall.

182 Ibid., 79.

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid., 80.

190 Ibid.

Hall cites Reverend A. Henderson for further proof:

A further objection which exists in the minds of many is based in the Fifth General Council of Constantinople. A careful consideration of the historical situation makes it abundantly clear that the question of Reincarnation was not even raised at the Council; and that the condemnation of certain extreme tenets of the Origenists was as act of Mennas, Patriarch of Constantinople in the provincial synod.¹⁹¹

Hall goes on to say that the consensus has never “anathematized or declared heretical,” the actual doctrine of reincarnation.”¹⁹² Nevertheless, after the Council of Constantinople the doctrine of reincarnation departed from Europe, and consequently, “...contributed to the misery and desolation of the Dark Ages.”¹⁹³

Reincarnation: an East-West Anthology, by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, compiles references to the early fathers’ and reincarnation. They cite E.D. Walker’s assessment of Justin Martyr as sure proof of reincarnation:

Justin Martyr expressly speaks of the soul inhabiting more than once the human body, and denies that on taking a second time the embodied form it can remember previous experiences. Afterwards, he says, souls who have become unworthy to see God in human guise, are joined to the bodies of wild beasts.¹⁹⁴

They claim that Clement of Alexandria also embraced reincarnation:

Not for the first time does He show pity on us from the very beginning...Philolaus, the Pythagorean, taught that the soul was flung into the body as a punishment for the misdeeds it had committed, and his opinion was confirmed by the most ancient of the prophets.¹⁹⁵

Head and Cranston argue that Origen’s *Contra Celsum* and *De Principiis* prove that he too

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid., 81.

193 Ibid., 81,82.

194 Head, Joseph and Cranston, S.L. *Reincarnation: an east-west anthology*. Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 35.

195 Ibid.

embraced reincarnation. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen gives the opinion of Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles:

Is it not more in conformity with reason that every soul for certain mysterious reasons (I speak now according to the opinion of Pythagoras and Plato and Empedocles, who Celsus frequently names) is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions?¹⁹⁶

In *De Principiis* Origen states:

Every soul...comes into the world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defeats of its previous life.¹⁹⁷

Moreover, Origen affirms the souls migration from one body to the next:

The soul, which is immaterial and invisible in its nature, exists in no material place without having a body suited to the nature of that place, accordingly, it at one time puts off one body, which was necessary before, but which is no longer adequate in its changed state, and it exchanges it for a second.¹⁹⁸

Cranston & Head also cite St. Gregory of Nyssa, Arnobius, Lactantius, Jerome, Augustine, and Synesius in order to prove that the early fathers' taught reincarnation. The authors comments on the Council of Constantinople in 553 are also worth noting. As other neo-Gnostic argue, they maintain that the Fifth General Council condemned individuals embracing the preexistence of the soul, and by implication, reincarnation.¹⁹⁹ While Cranston and Head insist that recent Catholic scholarship permits belief in reincarnation for Catholic Christianity,²⁰⁰ they appear to agree that the consensus of scholarly opinion concerning the conclusions of the Fifth General Council. Indeed, that Origen is not condemned for embracing reincarnation at this council, is outlined in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Vol. 11, 311). We discuss these in chapter 5.

Cranston and Head conclude their study of the early fathers' and reincarnation suggesting that

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 39.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 40.

Origen's condemnation by the Fifth General Council effectively removed any consideration of preexistence of souls from Christian thinking.²⁰¹

C.J. Ducasse argues that Origen is a prominent Christian thinker who embraced reincarnation. That is, Origen believed that after death, the soul repeatedly enters a new body until it reaches purification and finally enters heaven.²⁰² Ducasse contends also that despite its condemnation [reincarnation] by the Second Council of Constantinople, Rufinus' translation leaves no doubt that Origen professed it.²⁰³

Geddes MacGregor concedes that while Tertullian devoted considerable space refuting transmigration,²⁰⁴ Justin Martyr's dialogue with Trypho on the subject is inconclusive.²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Macgregor is convinced that the evidence indicates that notable Christians routinely considered reincarnation. Indeed, a number of patristic scholars agree that Clement and Origen both embraced a kind of transmigration that fundamentally agrees with the Pythagorean or Platonic conception of reincarnation.²⁰⁶ We know also that Origen charges Celsus of distorting the Christian doctrine of resurrection because they (the Christians) misunderstood transmigration of souls.²⁰⁷

MacGregor argues further that Gregory of Nyssa and other fathers' assert that transmigration of souls is compatible with the Christian doctrine of resurrection.²⁰⁸ Indeed, MacGregor suggests that while Origen rejected certain forms of reincarnation, his system depends in part on reincarnation; otherwise, it makes no sense.²⁰⁹ MacGregor cites two examples: *De Principiis* 1, 4, 1. and, 1, 8, 4. The first passage states:

All rational creatures that is incorporeal and indivisible, if they become negligent gradually sink to a lower level and take to themselves bodies suitable to the regions into which they descend; that is to say, first, ethereal bodies, and then aerial. And when they

201 Ibid., 41.

202 C.J. Ducasse, *A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life after Death*. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 213.

203 Ibid. To prove his point, Ducasse cites *De Principiis* IV Cap. 3, 10, 26, 23, and the Latin translation of the German *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte*, Vol. 5. 338.

204 MacGregor, Geddes. *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 47.

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid., 48.

207 Ibid., 49.

208 Ibid., 50.

209 Ibid., 53, 54.

reach the neighborhood of the earth they are enclosed in grosser bodies, and last of all are tied to human flesh. It is a mark of extreme negligence and sloth for any soul to descend and lose its own nature so completely as to be bound, in consequence of its vices, to the gross body of one of the irrational animals.²¹⁰

And *De Principiis* 1, 8, 4:

When the soul falls away from the good and inclines toward evil it becomes more and more involved in this process of degradation. Then, unless it turns back, it is rendered brutish by its folly and bestial by its wickedness and it is carried towards the conditions of unreason and, so to speak, of the watery life. Then, as befits the degree of its fall in- to evil, it is clothes with the body of this or that irrational animal.²¹¹

Jerome's indictment against Origen's belief in reincarnation is also apparent:

If anyone can show that incorporeal and rational nature, when deprived of a body, can live by itself, and that it is in a worse condition when clothed with a body and in a better when it lays the body aside, then no one can doubt that bodies did not exist in the beginning, but are now created at intervals on account of the different movements of rational creatures, in order to supply a covering to such as need it; and that on the other hand, when these creatures have risen out of the degradation of their falls to a better condition, the bodies are dissolved into nothing; and that these changes go on happening for ever.²¹²

According to MacGregor, this passage (in the Latin), along with the Greek text of Origen, strongly implies reincarnation.²¹³

MacGregor ends his discussion of the New Testament and patristic witness to reincarnation by pointing to misconceptions surrounding the decisions of the Council of Constantinople in 553. First, the list of fourteen anathemas pronounced against the heretics by the Council, mentions Origen's name only once and even then, it may be an interpolation. Second, the Fifth General Council condemns certain aspects of Origenism, not Origen, himself.²¹⁴ Third, the results of the council notwithstanding,

²¹⁰ Ibid., 55.

²¹¹ Ibid., 55,56.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

have lasting effects because the doctrines of preexistence and transmigration of souls in any form lose any consideration by orthodox Christians.²¹⁵ Thus, Origen is wrongly condemned and the doctrine of reincarnation along with him.

Leslie Weatherhead claims that the early church accepts the doctrine of reincarnation for the first five hundred years until its rejection at the Council of Constantinople in 553.²¹⁶ In fact, he believes that this major church council proves that it is widely held.²¹⁷ Thus, Weatherhead argues that among others, Origen, Augustine, and Jerome all embraced reincarnation.²¹⁸ Additionally, that no Ecumenical Council has ever declared the doctrine of reincarnation heretical is a testament to its legitimate belief by Christians.²¹⁹

Herbert Bruce Puryear argues that reincarnation is viewed as viable by early Christians for the first two or three hundred years. In fact, the evidence indicates that many of the greatest early Christian leaders embrace it.²²⁰ Origen, in particular, typifies a Christian who believes that the true divine nature of the soul and its preexistence eventually returns to God. Puryear claims further that because Origen taught reincarnation, the case that early Christians (including Jesus) taught reincarnation, lends it enormous credibility.²²¹ Despite the advancement of reincarnation thinking among early believers, it was later “eliminated from traditional thought” in 553 when Justinian anathematized the teachings of Origen, particularly his doctrine of preexistence.²²²

Curtiss’ commentary of the early fathers’ and reincarnation is essentially identical to other neo-Gnostic opinion:

Justin Martyr (100-167 A.D.), the greatest authority on Church history up to the middle of the second century, expressly speaks of the Soul’s inhabiting more than one human body. St. Clement, bishop of Alexandria (150- 215 A.D.), who brought the culture and philosophy of the Greeks to the Christian Church, and who was the teacher of Origen also held and taught this doctrine. St. Gregory of Nyssa (329-389) said, “It is absolutely necessary that the Soul should be healed and purified, and if this does not take place during its life on earth, it must be accomplished *in future lives*.” St. Jerome (340-420

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Weatherhead, Leslie D. *The Christian Agnostic*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 297.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 297.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Puryear, Herbert Bruce. *Why Jesus Taught Reincarnation: A Better News Gospel*. Scottsdale, AZ: New Paradigm Press, 35.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

A.D.) in his *Epistle to Avitus*, held the doctrine was taught as a mystery in the early Church. Arnobius Rufinus' (345-410 A.D.) Letter to Anastasius says, "We die many times," and that this doctrine was common among the early Church Fathers.²²³

Concerning Origen, he writes:

And Origen (185-254 A.D.), who is called, "The most distinguished and most influential of all the theologians of the ancient church... the father of the Church's science...the founder of the Church's theology...finding an intellectual expression and philosophical basis for Christianity...besides whose essays later teachings are like school boy's essays," held firmly to reincarnation. In *De Principis* he says that in the body each Soul enjoys that lot which is most exactly suited to his previous habits. In *Contra Celsum* he asks: "Is it not more in conformity with reason that every Soul...is introduced into a body...according to its deserts *and former actions*?" In this way alone, he thought the justice of God could be defended.²²⁴

Curtiss ends his discussion of early fathers and reincarnation asserting that while the consensus generally holds that the Church condemned Origen, his views were actually condemned at a local synod in 543 and not by the Fifth general Council in 553.²²⁵ Indeed, the Christian Church has never *officially* condemned reincarnation or declared it to be heretical.²²⁶

In *Reincarnation for the Christian*, Quincy Howe, Jr., devotes an entire chapter to the subject of reincarnation and the church.²²⁷ The contents are too lengthy to present here so we will provide only a brief overview. Howe begins his survey by pointing to the Origenist controversy (between 250 and 553) at which time the orthodox Christians call a number of Origen's doctrines into question.²²⁸ Howe concludes that the orthodox position is the same as Origen's: one may accept personal salvation through Jesus Christ and affirm reincarnation at the same time.²²⁹

Howe admits that despite his accomplishments, in 553 fifteen anathemas are charged against

223 Ibid.

224 Ibid.

225 Ibid., 39.

226 Ibid.

227 Howe, Quincy, Jr. *Reincarnation for the Christian*. Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 62-84.

228 Ibid., 62.

229 Ibid.

Origen.²³⁰ At the same time, Howe believes that the indictments against him are invalid due to procedural technicalities committed by the council.²³¹ Despite this, the decisions of the council damaged Origen's reputation effectively removing reincarnation from the church.²³²

Steven Rosen argues in *The Reincarnation Controversy*, that conventional history has been mistaken about the acceptance of reincarnation in the early church.²³³ He maintains that Christendom embraced reincarnation until it was deemed to be an "inappropriate concept" by ecclesiastical authorities in 553.²³⁴ Rosen argues that Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Arnobius, and St. Jerome, all advocated reincarnation thinking.²³⁵ Moreover, Rosen believes that Origen is one of the earliest Christian theologians whose teachings reflect reincarnation as espoused by the Platonists, the Jewish mystics, and Hinduism.²³⁶ He cites the opinion of historian Isaac de Beausobre to demonstrate his point:

It is certain that Origen believed that souls animate several bodies successively, and that these transmigrations are regulated according to the souls' merits or demerits.²³⁷

Rosen also cites Origen directly:

By some inclination toward evil, certain spirit souls come into bodies, first of men; then, due to their association with the irrational passions after the allotted span of human life, they are changed into beasts, from which they sink to the level of plants. From this condition they rise again through the same stages and are restored to their heavenly place.²³⁸

230 Ibid., 62.

231 Ibid.

232 Ibid., 83.

233 Rosen, Steven J. *The Reincarnation Controversy: Uncovering the Truth in the World's Religions*, Badger, CA: Torchlight Publications, Inc., 72.

234 Ibid.

235 Ibid., 78.

236 Ibid., 79.

237 Ibid. See, Beausobre, Isaac de. *Historie Critique de Manichee et du Manicheisme*. Amsterdam: (1734-1739), II, 492, as cited by Rosen.

238 Ibid., Rosen, *On First Principles*, Book I.8 as cited in *Origen*, trans. B.W. Butterworth, New York: Harper & Row, 1966, 73.

Rosen argues that the Roman Catholic Church refuses to canonize Origen after his death not because of his views on reincarnation, but for actions, he took for the sake of celibacy.²³⁹ However, according to Rosen, Origen's teachings are officially condemned in the sixth century by church authorities wanting to unit the kingdom.²⁴⁰ Rosen cites author and historian Joe Fisher to prove his point:

Since AD 553, when the “monstrous restoration” of rebirth was denounced by Emperor Justinian, the faithful have been taught to believe in eternal life while ignoring immortality's spiritual sister, reincarnation. Christians learn that eternity starts at birth. But, since only the beginningless can be endless, one might as well have faith in a table's ability to stand on only three legs.²⁴¹

Rosen ends his commentary arguing that despite official condemnation and the Pope's revocation, Origen's views still have the support of educated Christians through the centuries.²⁴²

Elizabeth Clare Prophet begins her discussion of early fathers and reincarnation pointing to the birth of Jacob and Esau in Genesis (25:23) as recorded in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (9: 11-14). According to the story, Jacob and Esau had different destinies from birth. God loved Jacob but hated Esau. One is destined for greatness; the other cursed. For Prophet, the passage raises the question as to why people are born differently. Of course, she believes that the answer hinges on the doctrine of reincarnation, the question at the heart of the debate from the second century on.²⁴³ Thus, some early Christians succumb to reincarnation while others reject it because they believe in the necessity of only one life.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Prophet insists that the only possible explanations for the outcome of the story are that God is either unjust or that the twins have earned their fate in previous lives.²⁴⁵

Prophet argues that Origen's comment on the fate of the twin's essentially sparks the Christian debate over reincarnation.²⁴⁶ In fact, according to Prophet, Origen is convinced that the only

239 Ibid.

240 Ibid., 80.

241 Ibid. Rosen cites Fisher in, *The Case for Reincarnation*. New York:NY: Bantam Books, 1985, 2.

242 Ibid., 82.

243 Prophet, Elizabeth Clare. *Reincarnation: the Missing Link in Christianity*. Corwin Springs, MT: Summit University Press, 1997, 172.

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid., 174.

246 Ibid.

explanation of the passage is that twin's exist in a previous life thereby earning God's affection or rejection.²⁴⁷ Again, Prophet places Origen at the center of the reincarnation controversy up until the sixth century.

Prophet admits that the editing of Origen's writings has led some scholars to question whether he actually taught reincarnation. Prophet notes that other scholars believe that Origen taught preexistence of the soul apart from reincarnation- a position that she insists is not possible.²⁴⁸ However, Prophet admits that Origen is difficult to understand, as he seems on the one hand to affirm reincarnation yet, on the other, deny it:

However, Origen had previously tries to harmonize the idea of an end with the idea of continuing opportunity through reincarnation. While affirming an end when the world would be "all in all" (1 Cor.15:28), he also predicted that after the dissolution of this world there will be another one.²⁴⁹

She continues:

After reading Origen's half-hearted rebuttal of reincarnation, one has to wonder if he is not using double-talk to dodge his enemies. Especially since in the very same commentary he goes on to *again* suggest preexistence as a way of defending God's justice... The most logical conclusion we can draw from Origen's denial of reincarnation yet contradictory support for preexistence is that his denial was a deliberate attempt to mislead his enemies and that he continued to teach reincarnation secretly.²⁵⁰

Prophet concedes that we cannot know Origen's thoughts on reincarnation apart from all his writings and the times in which he lived.²⁵¹ After careful investigation, she is convinced that these elements reveal that he secretly taught reincarnation.²⁵² Prophet argues further that Origen's belief in reincarnation was influenced by several other contributing factors:

1. Christian and Jewish Scriptures- Origen was familiar with Jewish

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 178.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 367, *On First Principles* 3.5.3, as cited in Butterworth, 239.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., 178,179.

traditions about reincarnation and divinization and at times seems to echo Philo (who taught reincarnation).

2. The Greek classics- Plato and Pythagoras were part of Origen's education.
3. Gnosticism- Origen absorbed it from a teacher named Paul the Antiochene.
4. Neo-Platonism- Origen studied under its founder, Ammonius Saccas.
5. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian teacher who headed the catechetical school before Origen- He is said to have taught reincarnation.²⁵³

Prophet argues that Origen's writings demonstrate that he taught preexistence and by implication, reincarnation. Indeed, Origen affirmed some form of existence prior to the present body. Prophet believes that this implies previous existence in human form.²⁵⁴

Prophet admits that while Origen's writings imply reincarnation, one cannot find explicit statements due to his practice of secrecy. Accordingly, if caught, Origen feared reprisals from his superiors who were developing a theology that excludes reincarnation.²⁵⁵ Prophet admits that while several Origen passages argue against reincarnation, his *Commentary on Matthew* indicates that his intention was merely to mislead his enemies.²⁵⁶

According to Prophet, Jerome's writings remove any doubt whether Origen taught reincarnation or not. That is, Jerome had access to Origen's unedited writings in the original Greek where belief in transmigration of souls is indisputable.²⁵⁷

As with most neo-Gnostics, Prophet addresses the Fifth General Council and its impact on reincarnation and early Christianity. Prophet admits that the fourteen anathemas issued by the council are against a number of individuals including Origen, and against several Origenist propositions that become the basis for the Church's rejection of reincarnation today.²⁵⁸ Prophet cites the first anathema:

If anyone asserts the fabulous preexistence of souls, and shall assert the monstrous restoration which follows from it: let him be anathema²⁵⁹

253 Ibid., 179.

254 Ibid.

255 Ibid.

256 Ibid., 182.

257 Ibid., 184.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid.

Prophet interprets this to mean that the soul returns to union with God and agrees with the Origenists that this takes place through reincarnation. However, Prophet insists that the condemnations of Origen and Origenism essentially defeated reincarnation in Christianity.²⁶⁰ Despite this, Prophet questions the legitimacy of Origen's condemnation at the Fifth General Council. That is, while the Pope later approved the conclusions of the council, the anathemas against Origen do not appear in those acts.²⁶¹ Accordingly, Christian churches today reject the doctrines of preexistence and reincarnation not because the Pope approves, but based on Justinian's anathemas.²⁶² Prophet therefore suggests that in theory, the absence of papal approval allows for belief in reincarnation among Christians today.²⁶³

A.T. Mann argues that as Christianity became more and more a religious and political force as it moved from traditional ideas of resurrection to concepts of reincarnation.²⁶⁴ This is also evident with respect to Origen's evolving view of reincarnation.²⁶⁵ Indeed, Mann believes that Origen taught the transmigration of souls just as the Gnostic, Platonic, and Orphic religions do.²⁶⁶

As with other neo-Gnostics, Mann maintains that Origen was condemned in 553.²⁶⁷ According to Mann, it was at this time that the Emperor Justinian formally rejected reincarnation and when the Fifth General Council issued its condemnation:

Whoever shall support the mythical doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul and the consequent wonderful opinion of its return, let him be anathema.²⁶⁸

Despite the circumstances leading to its condemnation, Mann maintains that reincarnation was widely considered by the early Christians until Platonic views on the immortality of the soul influenced

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 222,223.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Mann, A.T. *The Elements of Reincarnation*. Rockport, MA: Element Books., Inc., 1995, 45.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

their concept of the resurrection of the body.²⁶⁹

In *Reincarnation: a Study of Forgotten Truth*, E.D. Walker argues that according to Jerome, early Christianity accepted varieties of reincarnation “...depending on shades of interpretation.”²⁷⁰ Moreover, their interest in reincarnation stems from questions surrounding the origin of the soul and its relationship to the body.²⁷¹ According to Walker, reincarnation, espoused in Gnosticism, was so pervasive that it spread throughout the early church.²⁷² Moreover, allusions to Gnostic ideas are evident in John’s Gospel.²⁷³

Walker argues that a number of early fathers embraced reincarnation. He cites Origen as the prime example.²⁷⁴ Walker argues that Clement of Alexandria appeals to Paul as his authority for teaching reincarnation.²⁷⁵ Walker also cites Rufinus’ letter to Athanasius where he says, “...[reincarnation] was the opinion common among the primitive fathers.”²⁷⁶ Finally, Walker argues that Jerome believed that that preexistence and reincarnation were esoteric doctrines “...communicated to only a select few.”²⁷⁷

According to Walker, the early fathers assimilated belief in reincarnation from the Gnostic's and Manichaeans, from the Neo-Platonists, and from the Jews and pioneers of Christianity.²⁷⁸ Moreover, the early fathers believed that reincarnation not only explained the fall of man, it was the only means of reconciling the existence of suffering, with the idea of a merciful God.²⁷⁹ Walker argues further that Justin Martyr is a great example of an early Christian who embraced reincarnation:

Justin Martyr expressly speaks of the soul inhabiting more than once the human body, and denies that on taking a second time the embodied form it can remember previous experiences. Afterwards, he says,

269 Ibid.

270 Walker, E.D. *Reincarnation: A Study of Forgotten Truth*. New Hyde Park, NY: University Books. Inc., 1965, 203.

271 Ibid., 203.

272 Ibid.

273 Ibid.

274 Ibid., 204.

275 Ibid.

276 Ibid.

277 Ibid.

278 Ibid.

279 Ibid., 210.

souls which have become unworthy to see God in human guise, are joined to the bodies of wild beasts. Thus, he openly defends the grosser phase of metempsychosis.²⁸⁰

Clement of Alexandria allegedly wrote stories about *metempsychosis* and previous worlds.²⁸¹ Arnobius also embraced reincarnation.²⁸² In addition, Origen, the greatest of the early fathers, embraced reincarnation as articulated in *De Principiis*:

It seems worthwhile, then, to enquire what this new term means; I am, indeed, of the opinion that as the end and consummation of the saints will be in those (ages) which are not seen, and are eternal, we must conclude that rational creatures had also a similar beginning. And if they had a beginning such as the end for which they hope, they existed undoubtedly from the very beginning in those (ages) which are not seen, and are eternal. And, if this is so, then there has been a descent from a higher to a lower condition, on the part not only of those souls who have deserved the change by the variety of their movements, but also on that of those who, in order to serve the whole world, were brought down from those higher and invisible spheres to these lower and visible ones, although against their will.²⁸³

While a number of Origen's contemporaries censured him for holding such views, he still had a strong following.²⁸⁴ Besides Origen, Nemesius, Synesius, and Hilarius, allegedly embraced some form of preexistence.²⁸⁵ However, it was the condemnation of Origen by Constantinople that permanently changed Christian theology from that time and throughout the course of religious thought.²⁸⁶

Finally, a passing comment from J. Allan Danelek's, *The Case for Reincarnation*, sums up the neo-Gnostic attitude:

"...the great Christian leader Origen (c. 185-254) taught the pre-existence of souls and implied a form of Christian-based rein-

280 Ibid.

281 Ibid.

282 Ibid.

283 Ibid., 213. Walker does not identify which references in *De Principiis*.

284 Ibid.

285 Ibid., 214.

286 Ibid., 215.

carnation, and that reincarnation is believed in by one group of early Christians called the Gnostic's.²⁸⁷

Assumption Three: Origen's Culture Influenced Him to the Extent that He Incorporated the Concept of Reincarnation in his Own Life and Teachings.

This argument assumes several things regarding Origen's life: one, he lived in Alexandria where variations of Pythagorean and Platonist thinking influenced his theology; two, Origen was educated in predominately Greek schools of thought and therefore embraced its philosophy; three, Origen sat under Ammonius Saccas, a prominent Neo-Platonist teacher, from whom he borrowed transmigration theory; four, Origen succeeds Clement, who also embraced reincarnation; and, five, Origen's exposure to Gnostic schools of thought influenced his views on reincarnation. Neo-Gnostics argue that the combination of these factors convinced Origen to fully embrace reincarnation.

In particular, Neo-Gnostics assume that because variations of Pythagorean and Platonist thinking dominated the Alexandrian culture, Origen also embraced reincarnation. Indeed, he was educated in pagan literature, particularly, Platonism.²⁸⁸ As stated, he also sat under Ammonius Saccas, the father of Neo-Platonism.²⁸⁹ Howe argues that while Origen's system rests on Scripture first, he also relied heavily on Platonic thought throughout his writings:

Platonic philosophy had firmly established itself in Alexandria about four hundred years before Origen's time, and anyone educated there was inevitably steeped in this tradition. Probably the most important doctrine of Platonism to influence Origen concerned the relationship between the body and the soul. Plato had proposed the theory that the soul, being divine and eternal, is inherently superior to the body, which, being physical matter, is subject to corruption. For a number of reasons, which vary within his works, Plato suggests that the soul is forcibly cast into the body, where it either prevails according to its own natural reason or is overwhelmed by the intemperance of the body.²⁹⁰

Additionally:

The soul passes from one body to another until it has proven itself

²⁸⁷ Danelek, J. Allen. *The Case for Reincarnation: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Soul*. Woodbury, MINN: 2010, 2,3.

²⁸⁸ Howe, Quincy Jr., *Reincarnation for the Christian*. Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974, 64.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 65.

superior to the inclinations of the flesh. Then after many lives, or a few if one had the good sense to be a philosopher, the soul wins freedom from the demands of the brutish and lustful body and is at liberty to return to its divine home under no compulsion to incarnate again.²⁹¹

Howe argues that Platonists ideas have important implications regarding Origen's developing theology. For example, the soul is a "divine and taintless essence that exists eternally, while the body is corrupt and short of duration."²⁹² Moreover, the soul "...needs more than one incarnation to acquire the experience and lessons that will reconcile it with the Absolute."²⁹³ Howe suggests therefore, that Origen willingly incorporated Platonic philosophy in order to "fill the gaps" between Platonism and Christian thinking.²⁹⁴

Howe argues further that because Origen's basic theology depends on Greek ideas, he embraced transmigration of souls. This is obvious in Origen's cosmology:

Originally, all beings existed as pure mind on an ideational or thought level. Humans, angels, and heavenly bodies lacked incarnate existence and had their being only as ideas. This is a very natural view for anyone trained in both Christian and Platonic thought. Since there is no account in the Scriptures of what preceded creation, it seemed perfectly natural to Origen to appeal to Plato for his answers.²⁹⁵

Moreover:

God for the Platonist is pure intelligence and all things were reconciled with God before creation- an assumption which Scripture does not appear to contradict. Then as the process of fall began, individual beings became weary of their union with God and chose to defect or grow cold in their ardor. As the mind became cool toward God, it made the first step down in its fall and became soul. The soul, now already one remove from its original state, continued with its defection to the point of taking a body. This, as we know from Platonism, is indeed a degradation, for the highest type of manifestation is on the mental level and the lowest on the physical.²⁹⁶

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid., 65,66.

293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

295 Ibid., 67.

296 Ibid.

Howe argues that Origen's view of Genesis suggests that he preferred a cosmic and metaphysical event to a literal interpretation.²⁹⁷ Most importantly, for Origen, the fall was voluntary, resulting in a "...degree of estrangement from God."²⁹⁸ Origen's dependency on Platonism is even more obvious:

Here in a very compressed and simplified statement is a theology that acknowledges the fall of man, the power of God's grace, the mediation of Jesus Christ, and the resurrection of the dead. It covers the entire course of cosmic history from before the creation until after the dissolution. It accounts not only for man's sojourn here on earth but also for his existence before the worlds began and after they shall pass away. It is an edifice that is massively supported by citations from Scripture. The only flaw in the eyes of posterity lay in the fact that when Scripture could not answer Origen's needs, he borrowed heavily from Platonism to supplement his structure.²⁹⁹

Geddes MacGregor argues that when Christian's preached in the Gentile world, they filtered their message through commonly held views on the nature of the soul.³⁰⁰ That is, Greek and Gnostic schools of thought influenced the Christian view of the soul. Some schools regarded the human soul to be immortal or a spark of the divine. Others believed that the soul embeds temporarily in an animal body, a prison, for corrective or educational purposes.³⁰¹ Stoicism and Platonism advanced theories concerning the destiny of the soul. Gnostic ideas also contribute significantly to the religious attitude of the day. It is not surprising that the notion of the preexistence of the soul is familiar to early Christians. According to MacGregor, Origen is a prominent exponent of the preexistence of the soul.³⁰²

The notion that the soul has pre-existed implies not only that its existence is somehow independent of the body but that, since it inhabited one body at least, it is likely to be on its way to inhabit others. In fact reincarnation views were among the various options discussed by early Christian thinkers in the Gentile world. Those who championed preexistence were sometimes called the

297 Ibid.

298 Ibid.

299 Ibid., 69.

300 MacGregor, Geddes. *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982, 17.

301 Ibid.

302 Ibid., 18.

pre-existiani.³⁰³

That Origen desires to influence his students in the broadest of terms, led him to study philosophy under the Neo-Platonist, Ammonius Saccas.³⁰⁴ This is precisely why he investigated the transmigration theory of the Neo-Platonism.³⁰⁵ Indeed, the similarities between his view and theirs is striking:

What he teaches about salvation is very much like the typical Indian doctrine of karma, along with the Christian doctrine of Providence. According to Origen, each soul is embodied once in each aeon. He seem to reject those forms of reincarnationism that teach multiple embodiments in one single aeon. Then at the final apocatastasis, all creatures, including the Devil himself, will be saved. So while he rejects certain forms of reincarnation theory, as we have seen, he constructs an impressive system that cannot be made intelligible without some form of reincarnation.³⁰⁶

MacGregor argues that because Origen appealed to Platonic tradition, he could not avoid its influence.³⁰⁷ Despite his belief that the soul was superior to the body that imprisons it, it is still conducive to reincarnation³⁰⁸

In view of the elaborate philosophical and theological system, he was able to construct, it is not easy to see that he could have found anything in Scripture that would have compelled such a resolute Christian Platonist to rule out the transmigration of the soul.³⁰⁹

A.T. Mann asserts that Origen's belief in reincarnation stems from the cultural influences espoused by Gnostic, Platonic, and Orphic beliefs.³¹⁰ Moreover, while reincarnation theory greatly influenced early Christianity, the Platonists concept of the immortality of the soul took on new meaning in light of

303 Ibid.

304 Ibid., 52.

305 Ibid., 53.

306 Ibid., 53.54.

307 Ibid.

308 Ibid.

309 Ibid.

310 Mann, A.T. *The Elements of Reincarnation*. Rockport, MA: Element Books., Inc., 45.

the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body.³¹¹

Elizabeth Clare Prophet argues that the Alexandrian culture of Origen's day impacted his thinking in several ways: Alexandria replaces Athens as the center of philosophy;³¹² Origen became head of the Church's catechetical school;³¹³ and, it is the place where a number of philosophical schools of thought (Neo-Platonism, Neo-Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism) competed for cultural dominance.³¹⁴ Indeed, Origen finds himself in the midst of a culture saturated with varieties of religious and philosophical thinking. As was the common practice of the day, Origen too approached the Bible philosophically.³¹⁵

Prophet argues that Origen's belief in reincarnation is based largely on his exposure to sources of reincarnation beliefs:

He may have accepted it [reincarnation] because he was convinced-through studying Gnosticism, the writings of Clement or other scriptures that have since been lost- that reincarnation was part of Jesus' secret teachings.³¹⁶

Additionally:

If Origen had rejected reincarnation, he would have had to argue that position coherently for his educated audience because many of them, being Neoplatonists and Gnostics, held the belief. But there is no record of his doing this. Instead, he persistently asks whether actions in previous existences are the cause of present troubles.³¹⁷

Prophet cites *On First Principles*, where Origen states that a soul's action in a previous life dictates its place or region in the present life.³¹⁸ She argues that this is a clear reference to preexistence and therefore proof of reincarnation. Here is Origen's full statement:

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Prophet, Elizabeth Clare. *Reincarnation: the Missing Link in Christianity*. Corwin Springs, MT: Summit University Press, 176.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 177.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 178.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 179,180.

If souls did not preexist, why is it that we find some blind from their birth, having done no sin, while others are born having nothing wrong with them? He answers his own question: “It is clear that certain sins existed [i.e., were committed] before the souls [came into bodies], and as a result of these sins each soul receives a recompense in proportion to its deserts.”³¹⁹

In other words, Origen believed that people’s fates are determined by their past actions.³²⁰

Similarly, Edward Moore argues that Origen is heavily indebted to Plato and that he relies to some extent on the philosophy of Pythagoras.³²¹ Additionally, Origen appeals to Stoic philosophers, whose works influenced his allegorical approach to the Jewish Scriptures:

Origen shares with Numenius a basic assumption about bodily existence, reflection in their respective attitudes toward the stars and planets. For Numenius, only the lower part of the soul is subjected to the fate (*heimarmene*) regulated by the stars, for Origen, the influence of the stars is benefic, insofar as they aid the soul in its striving for divine life. These attitudes are due to their shared position that the incarnation of the soul in matter is bad; for Numenius, the incarnation of the soul is due to its succumbing to temptation by malicious demons; for Origen it is the result of contemplative laxity or inattention. In the case of Numenius, the stars are responsible for doling out the fate that rules the lower portion of souls; in Origen’s case, the stars are seen as partners with God, working for the perfection of souls. Both of these conclusions - while quite different - stem from a recognition that bodily incarnation is an evil.³²²

Moore further argues:

Cronius denies the migration of souls into animals, an argument that would have been helpful to Origen as he formulated his own doctrine of a special type of reincarnation, or recurrence of the soul, in multiple paedeutical aeons.³²³

Moore is convinced that while Origen was a philosopher, his cosmology reflected esoteric aspects of

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Moore, Edward, “Evagrius Ponticus and the Condemnation of Origen,” *THEANDROS*, Vol.2, No.3, Spring 2005, 1.

³²² Ibid., 2.

³²³ Ibid.

Gnosticism, which blended theology and philosophy in their cosmological schema.³²⁴ Accordingly, both Origen and the Gnostic's used allegory to inject Platonic philosophical concepts into Scripture.³²⁵ While Origen denied the materialism of Stoicism, he borrowed their notion of "cooling off."³²⁶ That is, like Stoicism, human souls preexist with God in a state of contemplation but became disinterested in their contemplative activity, fell away from God, and grew cold.³²⁷ Origen explains it this way:

...to facilitate the soul's new, fallen existence, God gives the souls bodies (garments of skins) tailored according to the extent of their fall. Angels received ethereal bodies; the stars and planets received circular bodies...humans received bodies of flesh and blood; and, finally, demons received cold and coarse bodies, since they were said to have voluntarily rebelled against God, whereas the other souls fell away largely by accident.³²⁸

According to Moore, this "mythically-based anthropology," was the basis for Origen's eschatological theory and the center of *apokatastasis* or restoration of all things.³²⁹

Finally, Moore cites the Gnostic theologian, Basilides of Alexandria, as proof that Origen depended to some extent on reincarnation.³³⁰

As we have demonstrated, most neo-Gnostics share the same view regarding the early fathers and reincarnation. It is equally clear that virtually all neo-Gnostics adhere to the same basic assumptions surrounding Origen and reincarnation. Indeed, their case for "Christian reincarnationism" rests essentially on whether their assumptions are based on fact or grounded in religious or philosophical bias. If their assumptions are true, there are no reasons why Christians should not embrace reincarnation. However, if their assumptions prove to be baseless, their claim that Origen embraced reincarnation and that it is compatible with Christian teaching, is false. We must therefore examine each of their assumptions and see whether they correspond to the facts. We believe that an objective investigation of the facts will demonstrate one way or other, whether the early Christians, and Origen in particular, embraced reincarnation.

324 Ibid., 3.

325 Ibid.

326 Ibid.

327 Ibid., 4.

328 Ibid.

329 Ibid.

330 Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

REINCARNATION: SOURCE TESTIMONY & MODERN DEBATE

Whether Origen embraced reincarnation or not is just one aspect of a larger debate surrounding the degree to which Greek thought influenced early Christian belief. A number of neo-Gnostic writers contend that besides Origen, other early fathers such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Tatian incorporated *metempsychosis* in their Christian thinking. The neo-Gnostics cite their writings as *prima facie* evidence that they taught reincarnation. However, I shall argue that when they cite their writings, they do so selectively and often out of context.

Neo-Gnostics also maintain that the religious and philosophical milieu in the early centuries of Christianity was so ripe for belief in reincarnation, that it is unthinkable that they could have escaped its influence.³³¹ We will argue that while Christians may have to some extent been influenced by the culture, they did not embrace reincarnation.

At the time of Origen in the third century, *metempsychosis* was already a popular concept. Neo-Platonists such as Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus both contemporaries of Origen, taught it. It was also taught in other philosophical and theological schools and in Gnostic thinking. However, I will argue that the assumption that early Christians in Alexandria embraced it because it was widely held is baseless. Moreover, the claim that the early fathers embraced it is also false.³³² Indeed, interest in reincarnation by the early Christians is minimal as they considered it to be alien to the Bible and Christian tradition. In fact, it posed no real threat to Christian belief precisely because it was a foreign concept. Nor was there an immediate need for the early fathers to condemn reincarnation, as Christ and the Apostles did not teach it. There is no evidence that it was taught in the Scriptures or in the *Rule of Faith*.³³³ However, the early Christians did struggle with increasing numbers of heresies, particularly with incipient forms of Gnosticism, that did teach it. Indeed, heresy forced believers to define their terms more clearly. As a result, “orthodoxy” (right belief or worship) was distinguished from heresy.³³⁴ While transmigration theory captured the attention of the early second and third-century Apologists,

331 Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1982), 6.

332 Manly P. Hall, *Reincarnation: The Cycle of Necessity* (Los Angeles: The Philosophers Press, 1939), 77.

333 For a brief overview of the *Rule of Faith*, see, John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 187-189. See also, J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, Prince Press Edition, 2003), 29-51 and Gerald Bray, *Creeds, councils and Christ: Did the early Christians misrepresent Jesus?* (Great Britain: Mentor, 1997), 91-117.

334 Harold O.J. Brown explains: ‘Orthodoxy historically has defined itself later than heresy, and often only in response to the propositions put forward by well-meaning heretics, but rejected by the community of faith.’ *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy In the History of the Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1988), 10.

they considered it a foreign doctrine and aptly refuted it.

Neo-Gnostic scholar's are intent on revising church history in order to prove that the early Christians embraced reincarnation. However, while some scholars agree with their assessment, others do not. In order to appreciate the wide range of scholarly opinion on the subject, we will present an overview of those supporting the neo-Gnostic view and those who oppose it.

Scholarly Opinion and Early Fathers' Views on Reincarnation

There has been considerable discussion on the subject of the early fathers' and reincarnation in recent years as evidenced by Journal articles, monographs, doctoral theses, and a number of published books..³³⁵ Some scholars opposing reincarnation, appeal to apologetic arguments in order to refute its claims.³³⁶ Others examine its relationship to the broader issues of life, death, and immortality.³³⁷ Some refute reincarnation from the Scriptures.³³⁸ Scholars favoring reincarnation typically present historical or theological arguments in order to prove that it is compatible with Christianity.³³⁹

We address the question of why scholars interpret the early fathers' and reincarnation differently later in our study. Our primary focus is not whether reincarnation is true or false or whether it is a biblical doctrine, but to examine the issues surrounding the early Christians and reincarnation and to address the neo-Gnostic assumption that it is compatible with Christian belief. Scholarly opinion is essential as it will help sort out the facts regarding the early fathers and reincarnation. Our discussion therefore, centers on source testimony and scholarly opinion. We are also interested in why scholars having access to the same primary and secondary source materials arrive at different conclusions. While personal bias accounts for some of these differences, there are other factors that are in play. Nevertheless, examining the facts will reveal one way or another, whether the early fathers embraced

335 See for example, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* (195), Jean Cardinal Daniélou, 'Metempsychosis in Gregory of Nyssa,' (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 227-243; D.L. Balás, 'The Encounter Between Christianity and Contemporary Philosophy in the Second Century,' *Angelic Theological Review*, Vol. 50 (1968): 3-15; Roy Kearsley, 'Faith and Philosophy in the Early Church,' *Themelios* 15.3 (1990): 81-86; H. Musurillo, 'Recent Revival in Origen Studies,' *Theological Studies*, 24 (1963): 250-263; Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 87-122; and, P. Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

336 See Norman L. Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986) and Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation: A Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1982).

337 John Hick, *Death & Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: life, death, and immortality in the early fathers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961).

338 John Snyder, *Reincarnation VS Resurrection* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

339 See for example, Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston, *Reincarnation: an east-west anthology* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1968); Geddes Macgregor, *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982); and, Quincy Howe, Jr., *Reincarnation for the Christian* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974).

reincarnation. However, before we examine their writings, let us weigh scholarly opinion on the subject of the early fathers' and reincarnation..

Scholars Affirming Patristic Witness to Reincarnation

A number of modern New Age or neo-Gnostic authors claim that the early Christians embraced reincarnation.³⁴⁰ Some suggest that Christians favored the doctrine of rebirth over resurrection, heaven, or hell.³⁴¹ Others argue that both the early fathers and the New Testament indicate that reincarnation was a doctrine taught in early Christianity.³⁴² George Burke suggests that reincarnation during the apostolic age and later was 'so common as to be a truism among the Christians.'³⁴³ Quincy Howe Jr., argues that the case for reincarnation in Christianity is clearest while under the influence of Platonism.³⁴⁴ However, their arguments are baseless as the facts refute the notion that the early Christians succumbed to foreign ideas. While some Christians deviated from orthodoxy,³⁴⁵ the Bible nowhere states that Christians universally embraced reincarnation. Indeed, while converts to Christianity often incorporated foreign ideas with their Christian thinking, to what degree this happens is debatable, as it appears that some practice this with greater liberty than others do. Again, there is no evidence that they incorporated reincarnation with their Christian belief.³⁴⁶ Indeed, some scholars admit that even Origen did not intend to combine Plato with the Scriptures.³⁴⁷ This is also true regarding other early fathers. While some of them combined aspects of Platonism with Christian belief, their rejection of reincarnation is obvious.

Neo-Gnostic scholars generally argue that the church anathematized reincarnation at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 AD.³⁴⁸ However, as we demonstrate in chapter four, a careful examination of the facts surrounding the Council refutes this notion. Rather than condemning Origen, the council

³⁴⁰ Head, & Cranston, 35-39.

³⁴¹ Steven Rosen, *The Reincarnation Controversy* (Badger, CA: Torchlight Publishing, Inc., 1997), 70.

³⁴² F. Homer Curtiss, *Reincarnation* (Santa Barbara: J.F. Rowny, 1949), 38-44.

³⁴³ As cited in Grayson, *Is Reincarnation Compatible*, 215.

³⁴⁴ Howe, 5.

³⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 11: 1-15; Colossians 2: 8-18; 1 Timothy 4:1-4.

³⁴⁶ Norbert Brox, 'The Early Christian Debate on the Migration of Souls' in *Reincarnation or Resurrection?* Herman Häring and Johann-Baptist Metz, eds., (New York: Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 75-80.

³⁴⁷ Howe, 65, 66

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

condemned teachings attributed to him by the ‘Origenists’. Additionally, Origen had already been condemned at an earlier time, but it was not for embracing reincarnation.

The doctrines of karma and reincarnation are at the core of the neo-Gnostic worldview.³⁴⁹ In order to convince that these doctrines are compatible with Christianity, they argue that the early Christians believed that the resurrection is a ‘kind’ of reincarnation.³⁵⁰ They further allege that by the first century, most Jews were unable to make intelligent choices regarding the transmigration of souls.³⁵¹ Indeed, most Jews presumed that it was a biblical doctrine. However, there are no facts supporting these assumptions. Most scholars agree that well before New Testament times, the generally accepted doctrine among Orthodox Jews is belief in a bodily resurrection, not in the transmigration of souls.³⁵² Moreover, the principle of physical resurrection continues to be a defining feature of traditional Judaism.³⁵³ While the New Testament writers were aware of transmigration theories, there is no evidence that they considered it to be a biblical teaching. Furthermore, the acceptance of reincarnation by early Christians first necessitates its presence in the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, from whom they received instruction. However, neither Christ nor the Apostles taught it. Despite this, neo-Gnostics argue that one must know the ‘mindset of the writers rather than their writings’ in order to understand their attitude on reincarnation.³⁵⁴ However, this makes no sense as their writings reveal their attitude on the subject. That is, the belief in or denial of reincarnation is determined essentially by examining both the content and context of their writings. There simply is no evidence that the Apostles borrow from pagan sources to explain or justify Christian belief.³⁵⁵

While MacGregor affirms textual support for reincarnation, he asserts that the reason that some early Christians did not see reincarnation in the text is they read the Scriptures too literally or ‘saw allegory in everything.’³⁵⁶ He cites Tertullian’s literalistic approach to biblical passages as an example

349 Annie Besant, *Karma* (London: The Theosophical Publishing society, 1904), 23.

350 MacGregor, *Reincarnation*, ix.

351 Ibid., 45.

352 The notion that the dead will be restored to their own bodies in a future age was spoken of in specific Old Testament passages (Job 19:25-27; Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 26: 19; Daniel 12:13) and well before Talmudic opinion becomes commonplace. Harold Coward, *Life after Death in World Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 11-30.

353 Ibid., 27.

354 However, the New Testament, while the product of both human and divine agency, does in fact reveal the mindset of the biblical writers. To read their writings is to know their mindset.

355 See, Ronald Nash, *Christianity, and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

356 MacGregor, *Reincarnation*, 46.

of how they misread key texts supporting reincarnation.³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, MacGregor admits that Tertullian had no sympathy towards the doctrine and in fact, spent considerable time refuting it.³⁵⁸ He also maintains that the outcome of Justin Martyr's dialogue with the Jew Trypho is not entirely clear.³⁵⁹ Yet, Justin Martyr rejects the notion that human souls pass into the bodies of animals. Other statements by Justin Martyr bear this out as well.³⁶⁰

The contention that before the Church embraced dogmas, Christians took reincarnation seriously, is false.³⁶¹ As we have argued, the early Christians had no interest in reincarnation, as it was a foreign concept deemed incompatible with the scriptures. Moreover, discussions of the subject took place primarily among the intellectuals and not with common folks. Indeed, prior to the formulation of dogmas, early Christians followed a comprehensive set of beliefs that excluded reincarnation.³⁶²

A number of neo-Gnostic writers argue that belief in preexistence of the soul is proof of reincarnation.³⁶³ They typically cite Origen as the best example,³⁶⁴ even though it is not clear that he held to preexistence of souls.³⁶⁵ However, even if Origen embraced it, one may embrace preexistence and reject reincarnation. That is, while reincarnation assumes preexistence of souls, preexistence by itself, does not assume reincarnation. The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints (LDS) illustrates our point. While preexistence of souls is an official doctrine of the LDS,³⁶⁶ they also teach that humans die once,³⁶⁷ and then await the resurrection.³⁶⁸ Mormon eschatology does not espouse karmic or reincarnation ideas.³⁶⁹ This said, the Mormon conception of preexistent souls also differs from Origen's

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ See, for example, Tertullian's *De Carnis resurrectione*, 1 and *De Anima*, 28-35.

³⁵⁹ MacGregor, 46-48.

³⁶⁰ *Apologia I pro Christianis*, 61; P.G. 6, 420 and *Dialogues cum Tryphone Judaeo*, 4; P.G. 6, 486

³⁶¹ MacGregor, *Reincarnation*, 47.

³⁶² Bray, *Creeds*, 91. See also, Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11.

³⁶³ MacGregor, 47,48.

³⁶⁴ MacGregor, 55.

³⁶⁵ Edwards, *Origen*, 89.

³⁶⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 76.

³⁶⁷ *Alma* 11:45

³⁶⁸ *Doctrines & Covenants* 29: 24, 25

³⁶⁹ Spence J. Palmer, 'Reincarnation' in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Macmillan Publishing Company) at:<

conception in that he maintained that God created spirits by divine decree. Mormons, on the other hand, teach that preexisting spirits are the offspring or the spirit-children of ‘celestial parentage.’³⁷⁰ Origen’s theory is essentially a response to the Valentinian and Marcionite theory of the origin of the soul.³⁷¹ He did not consider it doctrine. However, the doctrine of preexistent souls or spirits, is an essential aspect of Mormon theology.

Some scholars argue that while the early fathers rejected Pythagorean and Platonic transmigration theory; they embraced some *form* of it.³⁷² They cite Origen as their prime example.³⁷³ However, we believe that rebirth in human or subhuman form still constitutes reincarnation.³⁷⁴ Moreover, the notion that the early Christians subscribed to any form of reincarnation contradicts their understanding of the resurrection.³⁷⁵ As we demonstrate in chapter 5, the biblical doctrine of resurrection does not imply reincarnation in any sense. Indeed, to argue that reincarnation refers to ‘repeated resurrections of a particular *kind*,’ is a gross misrepresentation of the Christian doctrine of resurrection. Moreover, that the early fathers’ chose terminology that excludes reincarnation to describe Christian resurrection, essentially refutes their argument.³⁷⁶

Scholars Affirming Patristic *Denial* of Reincarnation

Hans Küng believes that while the evidence favors the early fathers’ denial of reincarnation, before excluding it from Christian belief one must first consider the objections to its inclusion.³⁷⁷ He therefore

<http://www.lightplanet.com/mormons/basic/afterlife/reincarnation.htm>> Accessed June 2007. Copyright 1992.

370 Ibid., 62,63.

371 Henry Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A.S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 207.

372 See for example, Richard Henry Drummond, *A Broader Vision* (Virginia Beach: A.R.E. Press, 1995), and Fredrick Spencer, *The Future Life: a New Interpretation of the Christian Doctrine* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935).

373 Ibid., 250. The author cite Ernst Benz, *Indisch Einflüsse auf die fruhchristlich Theologie* (Weisbaden: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, 1951), 185-190, to buttress his own position.

374 See footnotes 8 and 9. Various reincarnation models are also discussed in Geisler & Amano, *The Reincarnation*, 167-171.

375 Brian E. Daily, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 216-224.

376 While used by others to refer to repetitive somatic embodiment’s that include various forms, early fathers used the word, *metensomatosi*s to refer to the assimilation by one body or organism of the elements of another or as a fresh organization of the body (*sōma*). See also, Bianchi, Ugo. ‘Origen’s Treatment of the Soul and the Debate Over Metensomatosi,s,’ *Origeniana Quarta* 4, no. 2-6 (1985): 270-281.

377 Hans Küng, *Eternal Life: Life after Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 63.

raises the question of whether a human soul existing as a substance independent of the body, agrees with Christian belief.³⁷⁸ Moreover, does the return of the prophet Elijah in the Gospels mean rebirth in another body.³⁷⁹ Finally, Küng wonders whether there is a soul before the body.³⁸⁰

Jaroslav Pelikan's analysis of early Christianity and reincarnation begins by contrasting the Christian view of death with the pagan view of death. He argues that the early Christians' viewed death and the afterlife optimistically, whereas, the pagans viewed death pessimistically.³⁸¹ That is, the early Christians viewed human life as a series of stages, and then death, while Greek philosophy held men hostage to endless cycles of reincarnation. Accordingly, the Christian life has a 'definitely prescribed end.'³⁸² Moreover, while the Greeks offered a philosophy of life, the Christian worldview gives both purpose and meaning to the cosmos.³⁸³ Indeed, Greek cosmology contradicts the Christian doctrine of creation, which affirms that God has no beginning. However, the divine in Greek thought has a beginning within time.³⁸⁴ Christianity, on the other hand, rejects the immortality of the soul and its migration into bodies³⁸⁵

While Pelikan considers Origen's view of the soul 'extra-biblical,' he is convinced that his attitude towards the consummation of history and final restoration, runs counter to Greek cosmology.³⁸⁶ Accordingly, Origen's case against transmigration ultimately rests on his belief that the providence of God guides the course of human history.³⁸⁷

Panayotis Tzamalikos is a noted authority on Origen.³⁸⁸ His discussion of time in Origen is an important contribution to the subject of transmigration of souls and early Christianity. Tzamalikos contends that Origen rejected the Greek concept of an infinite world because an infinite world has no foreknowledge. That is, if the world has no beginning and is endless, any notion of before, hence

378 Ibid.

379 Ibid.

380 Ibid.

381 Pelikan, *Christianity*, 11.

382 Ibid., 12.

383 Ibid., 13.

384 Ibid., 14.

385 Ibid., 15.

386 Ibid., 90.

387 Ibid., 90,91.

388 See his *The Concept of Time in Origen* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); *Origen – Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

foreknowledge, is meaningless.³⁸⁹ Moreover, if there is no foreknowledge, prophecy loses all meaning.³⁹⁰ Tzamalikos argues that Origen's rejection of transmigration ultimately rests on his concept of time. That is, Origen believed that the finite duration of the world has both a beginning and an end, and 'action in the context of time, has purpose directed towards an end.'³⁹¹ Accordingly, human freedom is not meaningful unless it is subject to judgment, and has an eschatological end in mind.

Another difference between Platonism and Origen concerns the place of the soul during an aeon or age. The imprisoned soul, according to Platonism, may be in or out of a body at any time during the period of an aeon.³⁹² Origen, however, argued that rational creatures may change a rank of life only at the end of an aeon and after divine judgment.³⁹³ Origen's eschatology stresses the gradual consummation of the world while recognizing the prospect of judgment and the punishment.³⁹⁴ However, the Platonists, regard the world as eternal, and because *metempsychosis* takes place at any time, there can be no consummation. Tzamalikos argues that Origen's doctrines of consummation alongside retribution, repudiates transmigration.³⁹⁵ Origen's conception of time also repudiates Platonism, as a number of passages bear this out.³⁹⁶ Tzamalikos is convinced that that Origen's concept of time may also account for the 'misconceptions' by his critics surrounding his cosmology and eschatology.³⁹⁷

Mark Julian Edwards' discussion of the Greek philosophical influence on Christian thought is noteworthy.³⁹⁸ His thesis centers on the differences between Origen and Plato, and between Christianity and the philosophical mythology of classical Greece. Edwards argues that Origen's goal was to construct a Christian philosophy with the 'intention of preserving theology from the infiltration of pagan thought.'³⁹⁹ However, because Origen's vocabulary is similar to that of Greek thought,

389 Ibid., 255.

390 Ibid.

391 Ibid., 255,256.

392 Ibid., 253.

393 Ibid.

394 *PArch* Praef.5.2; 10.1; *PArch* 3.6.6; 3.6.9

395 Ibid., 253.

396 See for example, *commMatt*, 13, 1; 10,20; *frMatt*, 314; *commJohn*, 6, XI; *Cels*, III, 75; V, 49; VIII, 30.

397 Ibid., 3.

398 Edwards, *Origen Against*, 541.

399 As stated on opening page, no number.

scholars often misunderstand him.⁴⁰⁰ However, many of the misconceptions are resolved by examining the sum of Origen's worldview. Origen's hermeneutics, eschatology, and cosmology, all relate to his anthropology and are radically opposed to Platonism.⁴⁰¹ This same attitude applies to his more speculative doctrines such as the preexistence of souls and *apokatastasis* or restoration of all things back to God. Edwards is convinced that while Origen appears to have embraced a form of transmigration, upon closer examination of his statements, he rejects it.⁴⁰² Edwards also suggests that it was common in Origen's time for those hostile to the Gospel to charge Christians with embracing transmigration in order to impugn their beliefs.⁴⁰³ However, as Edwards points out, while Origen maintains that souls are awarded bodies according to the gravity of their fall, '...it does not prove that transmigration has occurred because there is no death.'⁴⁰⁴

Henry Crouzel was at one time the greatest living authority on Origen. His analysis of preexistence and transmigration begins with Origen's assertion that the end is like the beginning.⁴⁰⁵ That is, Origen believed that the end explains the beginning as explained in his doctrine of *apokatastasis* (restoration of all things back to God).⁴⁰⁶ He envisions a time where all of creation is in perfect submission to God as before. However, while he considered his view to be scriptural, he admitted that it was his opinion.⁴⁰⁷ Crouzel argues therefore, that an investigation of *apokatastasis* apart from other doctrines in Origen is illegitimate.⁴⁰⁸ Although Origen gives the impression that *apokatastasis* allows for successive worlds, he insisted that this was not the case.⁴⁰⁹ Whatever Origen may have meant by successive worlds, Crouzel is convinced that Origen rejected transmigration of souls.

Crouzel argues that Origen's concept of preexistence differs from that presented in Platonism.⁴¹⁰ Indeed, Origen borrows it from the Greeks in order to explain some aspect of Christian belief.

400 Ibid.

401 Ibid.

402 Ibid., 97. Edward's mentions three varieties of the day: from human to animal bodies; from one human body to another; and the divine, daemonic, or angelic to the human.

403 Ibid.

404 Ibid., 161.

405 Crouzel, *Origen*, 205.

406 Ibid.

407 *PArch* I.6.3; *ComJn* 28.8

408 Crouzel, 235.

409 Ibid., 205.

410 Ibid., 207.

However, he does not hold it dogmatically, as his theory is a response to the Gnostic view of the origin of the soul and therefore, justifiable.⁴¹¹ Moreover, Origen's doctrine of preexistence is not heretical and he should not be condemned for holding it.⁴¹² This said, Origen's interpretation of the fall, is still problematic for Crouzel.⁴¹³

Crouzel argues that Origen's devotion to Greek ideas is excessive, as evident in his refuting Celsus' charges against Christianity. Moreover, his cosmology, though differing significantly from Platonism, shows some degree of dependency.⁴¹⁴ However, Crouzel is convinced that Origen is able to retain a critical 'independence of Plato.'⁴¹⁵ In my view, this also accounts for his rejection of transmigration of souls.

Jean Daniélou argues that Origen's rejection of *metempsychosis* (transmigration of the soul) is apparent from other sources, where he considered it foreign to the Christian faith.⁴¹⁶ He also suggests that, Origen's *Commentary on St. John* reveals his 'opinion of metempsychosis,' and nothing more.⁴¹⁷ Additionally, Origen's *Commentary on St. Matthew* demonstrates his rejection of *metempsychosis*.⁴¹⁸ Daniélou agrees with other scholars that Origen rejected *metempsychosis* for eschatological reasons: a gradual consummation of the world contradicts an endless world of successive embodiment's.⁴¹⁹ Daniélou argues further that while Origen carefully examined the merits of *metempsychosis*, he rejected it.⁴²⁰

Paul Siwek traces the roots of reincarnation in its primitive forms, through the various religions, and then to Christian origins at which time the theory of reincarnation began to lose ground.⁴²¹ That is, resistance of reincarnation by early Christians can be traced certainly from the fourth century and

411 Ibid.

412 Ibid., 208, 209.

413 Ibid., 213.

414 Ibid., 157.

415 Ibid.

416 *Origen*, Walter Mitchell, trans., (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 250.

417 Ibid.

418 Ibid.

419 Ibid.

420 Ibid., 288.

421 Paul Siwek, *The Enigma of the Hereafter* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), xii.

probably as early as the first.⁴²² Siwek argues that rejection of reincarnation is evident by the teachings of Christ, the early fathers and by ecclesiastical writers.⁴²³ Siwek argues therefore, that the claim by Neo-Gnostics' that ecclesiastics rejected reincarnation in order to gain power over the masses, contradicts the facts.⁴²⁴ Moreover, besides certain apostates of the time, 'no authorized representatives of Christianity' mentions reincarnation.⁴²⁵

Siwek's discussion regarding key differences between preexistence of souls and reincarnation is also worth noting. He argues that because preexistence does not indicate whether the union of the soul with the body is only once, or several times, Origen could embrace it, and yet reject reincarnation.⁴²⁶ Moreover, the early fathers' refutation of *metempsychosis* is a condemnation of reincarnation 'of any kind in all forms.'⁴²⁷ In addition, the early fathers' condemnation of reincarnation is tantamount to Christ's own condemnation of it.⁴²⁸

Riemer Roukema repudiates the notion that Pamphilus, Jerome, and Justinian, were able to prove that Origen embraced the doctrine of transmigration.⁴²⁹ As we have noted, most allegations stem from Origen's *investigation* of transmigration, not because he embraced it. Moreover, Jerome admitted that while Origen investigated the topic, he did not intend to establish it as doctrine.⁴³⁰ However, because the Greek is lost; we depend on Rufinus' abridged Latin translation, on Jerome's Latin version, and on Justinian's brief quotations in Greek that are less than reliable.⁴³¹ Indeed, Rufinus' version states that Origen explicitly rejected transmigration because it was contrary to the Christian faith.⁴³²

Roukema asserts that because Origen was often misunderstood, some accused him of embracing transmigration. For example, Origen spoke of the preexistence of rational creatures and their

422 Ibid., 11.

423 Ibid.

424 Ibid.

425 Ibid.

426 Ibid., 16.

427 Ibid., 17.

428 Ibid.

429 Riemer Roukema, 'Transmigration of Souls,' in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, John Anthony McGuckin, ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 206.

430 Ibid.

431 Ibid.

432 Ibid.

incarnation in human bodies.⁴³³ However, Roukema rightly concludes that Origen entertained transmigration as a theoretical speculation, and not as a serious possibility.⁴³⁴

Reincarnation and the Writings of the Early Fathers

Scholars disagree whether or not the early fathers' embraced transmigration of souls. However, in my view when read in their immediate and broader context, there can be no doubt that the early fathers' deny transmigration. Obviously, their writings on the subject are too voluminous to present in full detail. However, documented sources are accessible in print and online, so their views may be easily attainable.⁴³⁵

A thoughtful reading of the early fathers' reveals that they not only rejected reincarnation, they refuted it out of hand. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that reincarnation is evident in early Christianity, others maintain that even though it is not a biblical doctrine, one should not rule out the possibility that it could become one.⁴³⁶ John Hick argues that the evidence is overwhelmingly against this notion:⁴³⁷

Leslie Weatherhead erroneously and misleadingly asserts that reincarnation 'was accepted by the early church for the first five hundred years of its existence. Only in AD 553 did the second Council of Constantinople reject it and only then by a narrow majority' (*The Christian Agnostic*, pp. 209-10). The fact is that reincarnation was taught within the Gnostic movement from which the church early distinguished itself and then treated it as a dangerous foe. All this means that the ideas of preexistence and reincarnation were live issues within the early church; but it does not mean that reincarnation was at any time 'accepted by the early church'.⁴³⁸

CHAPTER 3

433 Ibid.

434 Ibid., 206, 207.

435 See Appendix D. Besides Siwek, see Albrecht, Robert A. Morey, *Reincarnation and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1980); and, Bobby Kent Grayson's doctoral dissertation, 'Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Evaluation' presented to the faculty of the School of Theology Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth Texas (September 1989).

436 John Hick, *Death & Eternal Life*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, 365. However, as we stress in another chapter, this is only possible if Christianity undergoes historical and doctrinal revision.

437 Hick's notes are too lengthy to present here. His full assessment is found on pages 392-395.

438 Ibid..

ORIGEN AND THE CULTURE OF HIS TIME

The early Christians believed that *metempsychosis* (or, transmigration of souls) was a foreign concept that neither the Bible nor tradition affirmed.⁴³⁹ However, in Alexandria, Egypt it was a major tenet of Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy and embraced by some of the Gnostic sects of the day. In fact, it was at the forefront of philosophical and religious thinking and the subject of debate among the intellectuals of the day. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how anyone, including Origen, could have ignored it. Certainly, educated Christians in Alexandria would have encountered scholars, personal acquaintances, or family members affirming transmigration. While this does not prove that Christians accepted the doctrine, it does indicate that they may have entertained the idea and/or participated in the general debate on the subject. Nor does this mean that some Christians were not attracted to it on an intellectual level. Origen appears to have investigated whether it was compatible with his Christian faith⁴⁴⁰ and mentions, at least on one occasion, that he knew of a Christian group that wanted to establish it as a Christian doctrine.⁴⁴¹ However, rather than offering them his support he rebuked them for entertaining such an idea.⁴⁴² Despite his attitude, some scholars insist that Origen embraced the migration of souls.⁴⁴³

Whether Origen embraced reincarnation or not depends largely on several factors that influenced his life: his Christian upbringing, knowledge of Scripture, interaction with pagan philosophy, and of course, the teachers he sat under. Because Origen was a very complex individual, he would at times give conflicting opinions. For example, on the one hand he rejected transmigration of souls because he believed it was contrary to the Christian faith,⁴⁴⁴ yet he appears to entertain the idea in his doctrine of *apokatastasis*.⁴⁴⁵ Origen also attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas (founder of the first Neo-Platonist school in Alexandria), and throughout his life he had a voracious appetite for studying pagan

439 Brox, Norbert, "The Early Christian Debate on the Migration of Souls." *Concilium: International Journal for Theology* 5 (1993): 75-139.

440 Ibid., 75.

441 Riemer Roukema, "Transmigration of souls" in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed., John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 206.

442 Brox, *The Early Christian*, 75-139.

443 E. Benz, "Indische Einflüsse auf die frühchristliche Theologie," *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und Literature, Mainz, Geistes- und Socialwissenschaftliche Klasse*, 1951, 3, 169-202: 184f., as cited by Brox, *ibid.*, 75.

444 *PArch* 2.9.3; *ComRm* 6.6.8; *ComMt* 11.17; *ComJn* 6.62-76; *CCels* 3.75

445 *PArch* 1.3.8; *ComRm* 5.10.13-16

thought and literature.⁴⁴⁶ He not only courted Greek philosophy, he incorporated it with Christian faith.⁴⁴⁷ In fact, some scholars believe the philosophical components that undergird his theology prove that he was a Neo-Platonist.⁴⁴⁸ It stands to reason, if he fully embraced Neo-Platonism, he also embraced their doctrine of transmigration of souls. Certainly, a Christian theologian sitting under a Neo-Platonist (Ammonius Saccas), suggests that he embraced ideas from both worlds.⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, some scholars believe that there are two individuals with the same name: one a Christian, the other a pagan demonologist.⁴⁵⁰ However, to argue that Origen embraced transmigration solely on his philosophical views, is not an accurate assessment of his thinking. That is, while approaches to Origen's philosophical background are valuable, they often fail to account for his interest in other sources such as the Rule of Faith, his Christian upbringing, and the Scriptures; all of which had profound influence upon his life.⁴⁵¹

Another reason why some scholars have accused Origen of embracing transmigration is because he explained Christian doctrine in terms that "classically trained men" could comprehend.⁴⁵² Origen urged his students to be conversant in both the methods and doctrines of philosophy. This is obvious in his response to the attacks of the Greek philosopher Celsus, in which he utilizes Platonic philosophy to elucidate Christian concepts.⁴⁵³ Accordingly, Origen typically examined the opinions of the heretics

446 Porphyry, ap. Eus. *H. E.* vi.19; Theod. *Graec. Affect Cur.* vi., 96

447 According to Eusebius, Porphyry made the following assertion: 'For he [Origen] was always in company with Plato, and had the works also of Numenius and Cranius, of Apollophanes and Longinus, of Moderatus and Nicomachus, and others whose writings are valued, in his hands. He also read the works of Chaeremon, the stoic, and those of Cornutus. From these he derived the allegorical mode of interpretation usual in the mysteries of the Greeks, and applied it to the Jewish Scriptures.' *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, trans., C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers), 209.

448 Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 113-164.

449 Robert M. Grant, 'Origen' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 5, ed., Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & the Free Press, 1967), 552.

450 For a discussion of this view see Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 54, 55.

451 Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 54.

452 Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 619.

453 We refer here to Origen's apologetic treatise entitled, *Contra Celsum*. It is a refutation of Celsus' *True Discourse*; a work directed against Christians around 178. At the request of Ambrose (around 246), Origen resolves to answer every objection (in minute detail) set forth by Celsus; a monumental work that reflects the great struggle between paganism and Christianity in the early days of the Church. This work in its entirety is in *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans., Henry Chadwick (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

and the philosophers on their own terms.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, Origen believed that philosophical thinking was indispensable, especially in testing theological arguments and in the defense of the Christian faith.⁴⁵⁵ He also believed that philosophy was a useful tool for studying Scripture because it helped discover the deeper meanings of the texts. However, he also knew the extent of its usefulness and the dangers of its deficiencies. He did not intend to merge all elements of philosophical thinking with Christian thought. This is evident in his rejection of polytheism, Greek and Stoic cosmology, and the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul. He also rejected the Platonic doctrine of the transmigration of souls. In this sense, Origen's dependency on Plato is less evident than some wish to admit. Edward's argues, '... far from exhibiting the symptoms of contagion, Origen's work contains the antibodies to Platonism as proof that he has suffered and resisted its attacks.'⁴⁵⁶

While the transmigration of souls is part of the smorgasbord of philosophical and religious thought in Alexandria at the time of Origen, there is no evidence that he embraced it or thought that it was compatible with Christian belief. Moreover, to suggest that he embraced it because it was widely held by religious thinkers and philosophers of the day, is grossly misleading. The prevailing influence of reincarnation in the culture does not prove that everyone embraced it. Moreover, we may determine Origen's beliefs partly by examining the extent to which he may or may not have succumbed to the prevailing philosophies of the day, and partly by his adherence to the Rule of Faith, his knowledge of basic Christian doctrine, and his devotion to the Scriptures.

In order to understand whether Origen assimilated pagan doctrines with Christian belief necessitates that we understand the cultural milieu in which he lived. We will therefore present an overview of the philosophical and religious landscape of Alexandria, Egypt, note the various subject matter taught by Origen at the Catechetical School, and then focus our attention specifically on the life and teachings of Origen's earlier life.

Philosophy and Religion in Alexandria

Reincarnation (or *metempsychosis*⁴⁵⁷) was not a new doctrine as it is appeared in one form or another in various cultures well before Origen's time.⁴⁵⁸ While its origin's is obscure, there is evidence

454 *H.E.*, 6.19.12, 13, 14, 15

455 David T. Runia 'Philosophy' in *The Westminster*, 173.

456 Edwards, *Origen*, 61.

457 Ninian Smart, *Encyclopedia*, 122.

458 From the Greek, meaning 'the transfer of the soul (*psychē*) from one body (animal or human) to another.' Reincarnation is also referred to as *palingenesis* (as associated with Stoicism), and *rebirth*. While these terms are typically synonymous across the different religions, there are subtle differences between Hindu and Buddhist thought regarding rebirth. Reincarnation in Hinduism implies that the soul transmigrates into either animate or an inanimate objects, while

in both Greece and India that it was not characteristic of early Aryan cultures. Most scholars trace its roots to prehistoric India where it assimilated with the Brahman religion and later appears as a new doctrine in the Upanishads.⁴⁵⁹ Eventually, *metempsychosis* made its way across the Persian Empire, then to Greece, and finally to Alexandria, Egypt through the influences of Pythagoras, Empedocles, Orphism, and Plato. It was also evident in Alexandria in the various schools of Gnosticism, Christian heresies, and influenced the teachings of the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus and Ammonius Saccas.

Alexandria was a center of intellectual and religious dialogue representing the vast world of Hellenism (a mix of Greek, Middle Eastern, and Indian culture)⁴⁶⁰ where the value and importance of education (based primarily on some aspect of philosophy) was glorified. The level of literary, scientific, and philosophical inquiry in Alexandria was second only to Rome and later to Antioch in importance. Alexander the Great founded this city some three-hundred and twenty-two years before Christ when it quickly became an important seat of commerce and of Greek and Jewish learning. It also housed one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world.⁴⁶¹ Alexandria's famous Neo-Platonic School attracted some of the greatest minds including Origen. Indeed, scholars from various regions came to Alexandria to study, teach, and translate literature and philosophy into Greek. Alexandria was the home of Philo, the greatest philosopher of Hellenistic Judaism and it was also the place where Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the *Septuagint*) in the third century BCE. By the end of the second century, it had become the home of one of the greatest centers of early Christianity. Alexandria's eclectic mix of Semitic and Hellenistic traditions paved the way for the foundation of the first Christian Catechetical school of theology headed by the prominent Christian teacher, Pantaeus, a converted Stoic philosopher.⁴⁶² However, unlike other areas in Asia Minor where apostolic tradition was revered, Alexandria's adherence to apostolic tradition is not as pronounced. Rather, it is a place where philosophy is extolled as the 'handmaid' of Christianity and not its enemy.⁴⁶³ It is no coincidence that in Alexandria we find a union of philosophy, between Platonism and Stoicism, and Christianity that resulted in a kind of Christian Gnosticism best represented by Clement of Alexandria. However, varieties of Gnostic ideas existed prior to Origen that had their roots in the

Buddhism denies the immortality of the soul teaching rather that no continuous self exists (*Anatta*). Thus, while Buddhism affirms the doctrine of rebirth (*Samsara*) it is not the 'self' that transmigrates but some aspect of the impersonal collection of aggregates (*skandhas*) that constitute the individual. For a more elaborate analysis of these terms, see *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, 122-124.

459 Ibid., 122. See also, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4, 4, 5) and *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (5, 11).

460 For a thorough study of Hellenism and its relation to Christianity, see Ronald H. Nash, *Christianity & the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

461 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1950), 777.

462 H.E., 5.11 1,2

463 Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 72.

Orphic and Pythagorean traditions. As we mention below, their core beliefs rests on the doctrines of transmigration and the immortality of the soul. These two doctrines alone, influenced the entire Greco-Roman world.

Orphism

Although it is debatable whether Orpheus actually existed, the term Orphism, describes two aspects of early Greek religion: a body of traditional poetry ascribed to a mythical singer called Orpheus, and a way of life based on those Orphic writings similar to the Greek ‘mysteries’ at Eleusis and elsewhere.⁴⁶⁴ Orphism greatly influenced Greek art and literature influencing such figures as Pythagoras, Empedocles, and even Plato.

As Orphism developed it became associated with Dionysus who, according to Greek mythology, had been captured (while in infancy) by the Titans, killed, and then eaten. In anger, the Greek god, Zeus, destroyed the Titans by a thunderbolt and from the ashes of the Titans emerged human beings, who by reason of their origins, had both an evil and a divine nature.⁴⁶⁵ While, Orphism retained the conception of this fallen god, it added the theory of transmigration of souls, holding that every human soul, preexisting with the gods, must at some point in its existence occupy a human body.⁴⁶⁶ However, the body with its evil Titan nature imprisons the soul and thus prevents it from discovering true freedom. This freedom, or release from the imprisonment of the body, comes through proper conduct. At the heart of Orphic eschatology are ethical prohibitions, directed towards a person’s conduct in his or her life. The conduct of every human determines the future state of the soul which will return to the gods or receive punishment for its sins by a return to the earth.⁴⁶⁷ The goal of Orphism is to achieve a level of purification that enables humans to recover their divine character.

Pythagoreanism

Unlike questions surrounding Orpheus’ existence, Pythagoras’ birth is on record. He was an Ionian Greek born on the island of Samoa in the eastern Aegean, off the coast of Asia Minor around 570 B.C. At the age of 40, he immigrated to Crotona in southern Italy where he founded a society with religious,

⁴⁶⁴ John Morrison, ‘Orphism’ in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol.6, 1. See also, Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 180-202. Orpheus’ poetry includes, among other themes, his accounts of the creation of the world, the afterlife of the soul, its judgment and punishment for sins on the earth, and its final reincarnation in another living body.

⁴⁶⁵ Milton C. Nahm, *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 47.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

political, and philosophical aims.⁴⁶⁸ While there are extant works by Pythagoras himself, there are a number of references to him in the works of his contemporaries or near contemporaries. Xenophanes ridicules Pythagoras' belief in transmigration of souls.⁴⁶⁹ Plato refers to the Pythagorean system and its relationship between astronomy and harmonics.⁴⁷⁰ There also exists scattered information about him in the writings of Aristotle.⁴⁷¹ These sources suggest that Pythagoreanism emphasized two philosophical aspects: a religious or moral focus that leads to the salvation of the soul, and a formal view of science that conceives of the cosmos as a mathematical structure. The combination of these two aspects resulted in the belief that numbers possess mystical significance pointing to the divine nature of the cosmos. At the center of this mix of religion and science was the belief in the essential unity or harmony of all life and the immutable order of the cosmos. For Pythagoreans, the essential unity of all life rests on the doctrine of transmigration of souls.

The Milesians influenced the Pythagorean construct of the cosmos, particularly through the teaching of Anaximander, an influential Greek scientist and philosopher often viewed as the founder of Greek astronomy and natural philosophy, and best known for his doctrine of the 'Boundless', or the *arche*, the starting point and origin of the cosmic process.⁴⁷² Anaximander taught that the Boundless transcends the process of world creation, circumscribes each individual world in space, and outlasts all of them in time.⁴⁷³ The Boundless also provides the inexhaustible material source, the eternal motive power, the vital energy, and the geometrical form and cyclical regularity for the cosmic process as a whole.⁴⁷⁴ Anaximander also speaks of the *apeiron* ('untraversable' or 'limitless'), a principle that surrounds, embraces, and governs all things. This principle points to the infinite void of the atomists and to the cosmic deity of Xenophanes, Aristotle, and the Stoics.⁴⁷⁵ Pythagorean cosmology similarly rests on the idea that the cosmos is one, eternal, and divine, and that man's soul (imprisoned by the body) is a fragment of this divine universal soul. However, because the body contaminates the soul, the soul must endure the wheel of reincarnation through cycles of rebirth until it has been purified and can return to its original state.

468 W.K.C. Guthrie, 'Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, 37-39.

469 Ibid.

470 Ibid.

471 Ibid.

472 Charles H. Kahn, 'Anaximander,' *The Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, 118.

473 Ibid.

474 Ibid.

475 Ibid.

While there are marked differences between Orphism and Pythagoreanism, there are obvious similarities. Both embraced the immortality of the soul, *metempsychosis*, the soul's punishment in Hades and its return to heaven, vegetarianism, as well as the emphasis on purification and asceticism.⁴⁷⁶ Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and early Greek thought, also emphasized immortality and the search for personal divinity.

Pythagorean influence on Greek philosophy and religion was far reaching: some of the greatest minds that Greece ever produced fall under its influence. For example, Plato adopted the Pythagorean concept of the mathematical basis of the cosmos with the implication that philosophy is instrumental to the divine. Plato also borrowed from Pythagoreanism, their doctrine of the transmigration and immortality of the soul.⁴⁷⁷ Because of Plato's influence, these doctrines penetrated the entire Greco-Roman world. Moreover, there is evidence that variations of these doctrines appear as early as the first century B.C.E. with the rise of Neo-Pythagoreanism, a movement that blended Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and Platonism.⁴⁷⁸ By the third century, these same tenets are found in Neo-Platonism and in the writings of the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria. Indeed, Philo adopted religious and philosophical thought in order to serve his own purpose.⁴⁷⁹ His attempt to synthesize Hellenism and Judaism greatly influenced Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ambrose, and other Latin Fathers, particularly with respect to the mystical and allegorical interpretations of Scripture.

As we discuss next, incipient forms of Gnosticism also dotted the landscape.

Gnosticism

Another important influence in Alexandria at the time of Origen, was Gnosticism. Gnosticism is derived from the Greek *gnosis*, meaning "knowledge". Gnosticism refers to a complex religious movement representing a variety of teachings and also draws on Indo-Iranian cultures.⁴⁸⁰ While the roots of Gnosticism are somewhat obscure, elements of it are present in pre-Hellenistic notions about matter, evil, and the afterlife. It is also present in the Jewish apocalyptic dualism of the second and first

476 Eliade, *A History*, 195.

477 G.R.S. Mead, 'Plato: Concerning Metempsychosis' in *Thrice Greatest Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis*, Book 1 Prolegomena (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1992), 299-304.

478 Ibid., 196.

479 C.K. Barrett, ed., *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), 254. See also, Henry Chadwick, 'Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought,' *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1967), 137-192 and Mead, 'Philo of Alexandria and the Hellenistic Theology,' 138-177.

480 Hans Jonas, 'Gnosticism' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, 336.

centuries B.C.,⁴⁸¹ and probably borrowed from Iranian dualism, some aspects of the Jewish Wisdom literature, and aspects of oriental mystery religions of Asia and Egypt.⁴⁸²

In recent times, scholars have debated whether Gnosticism was a pre-Christian movement. However, most agree that Gnosticism arose as a heresy or perversion of Christianity in the second century A.D. Even before the establishment of the Neo-Platonic School and the Christian Catechetical School, a variety of Gnostic schools flourished in Alexandria. Between 130 and 180, Basilides, Valentinus, and Heracleon, dominated Christian intellectual life in Alexandria.⁴⁸³ Basilides (85-135) taught that by reincarnation souls might achieve salvation,⁴⁸⁴ claiming that wrongs inflicted on Christians by the rulers of the present world are a result of sins committed in a previous life, prompted a sharp response from Clement.⁴⁸⁵ Similarly to Basilides, Carpocrates (78-138) believed that positive deeds release humans from the cycle of reincarnation.⁴⁸⁶

That incipient forms of Gnosticism were present during the Apostolic era is also evident from the New Testament.⁴⁸⁷ Paul alludes to Gnostic teachers who engaged in speculations about angels and spirits, and warns Christians to avoid their radical ascetic and antinomian views.⁴⁸⁸ He also warns them about Gnostic teachings that emphasize the spiritualization of the resurrection, and distort the literal, physical return of Christ.⁴⁸⁹ Paul is not alone in condemning Gnosticism. The polemical aim of 1 and 2 John was directed against the corrupting influence of Doceticism, an early form of Gnostic thinking.⁴⁹⁰

While there were varieties of Gnostic schools, Gnosticism in general, advanced speculative and syncretistic ideas. That is, followers of Gnosticism sought the deeper knowledge of the divine, believing that realization comes only through initiation in rites, ceremonies, and appropriation of

481 Lee Martin McDonald and Stanley E. Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 236.

482 Ibid., 236.

483 W.C.H. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1986), 195.

484 Walker, *A History of the Christian*, 63, 64.

485 *Strom* 4.81-3.

486 Jonas, 'Gnosticism,' 340.

487 Colossians 2:18-23; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:14-18; Titus 1:10-16; 2 Peter 2:1-4; Jude 4, 16; Revelation 2:6, 15, 20

488 Colossians 2: 8-19

489 Ibid.

490 Robert Law, *The Tests of Love: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 25-38. See for example, 1 John 1:1,14; 20:31; 2:22; 4: 2-4-15; 5:1, 5,6; and, 2 John 7.

mystical teaching. Indeed, Gnosticism attempted to merge pagan, Jewish, and Christian thought in order to resolve man's basic moral and ethical problems.

Scholars identify at least three distinct schools of second-century Gnosticism: 1) in Syria, associated with the religion of Zoroastrianism; 2) in Alexandria, associated with Basilides, Carpocrates, and Valentinus; and, 3) a rather different strand associated with Marcion.⁴⁹¹ It is the Alexandrian type which has most bearing on the subject of transmigration of souls.

Several ideas dominate Gnosticism. First, the Gnostic's believed in a cosmic dualism between spirit and matter, good and evil. Second, they held that matter was inherently evil. Third, they taught that a malicious god (the Demiurge, identified with the God of the Old Testament) created the universe. Fourth, they understand that salvation comes about through esoteric knowledge that frees the soul of its imprisonment in the material world. Fifth, they argue that Christ only appeared to die. Sixth, they taught that Jesus' resurrection was spiritual, and not physical. Finally, Alexandrian Gnostic's, in particular, embraced transmigration of souls.⁴⁹²

Until the discovery of Coptic-Gnostic literature in Egypt in 1945, what we knew about Gnostic belief came from patristic sources. Indeed, many early writings reflect responses to Gnostic threats against Christian belief.⁴⁹³ Early authors such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Augustine, Epiphanius, and Origen not only sought to counter the influence of Gnostic ideas; they aptly refuted them. Moreover, refuting Gnosticism helped in the development and solidification of orthodoxy. However, Gnosticism remained a threat to Christian communities well into the fifth century. Daley puts the influence of Gnosticism in its proper perspective: "It is not that it is just another Christian heresy; it is that their elitist thinking claims privileged access to an understanding of existence itself."⁴⁹⁴

Neo-Platonism

Ammonius Saccas was the founder of the famous Neo-Platonic School in Alexandria toward the close of the second century. Its aim was to restore the declining Platonist philosophy and theology that had taken place over the past several decades. The fertile soil of Alexandrian eclecticism provided a perfect environment for this. Not only did Neo-Platonism stress a renewed interest in traditional Platonism, it also presented the intellectual elites in Christianity opportunities to challenge second-

⁴⁹¹ Nash, *Christianity*, 214.

⁴⁹² Benjamin Walker, *Gnosticism: Its History and Influence* (Willingborough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1983), 141.

⁴⁹³ For a scholarly analysis of Gnostic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt with later Platonic literature, see John Turner 'Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Nag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature' in *Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism*, Rich T. Wallis, ed., (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 425-459.

⁴⁹⁴ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 25.

century paganism. Neo-Platonism represented an attempt by the aristocratic intellectuals of Alexandria to synthesize elements of Platonism and Neo-Pythagoreanism with other ideas of the day. It was the last of the great philosophical schools of the ancient world and one in which Hellenistic philosophical development reached its apex.⁴⁹⁵

Plotinus (205- 270), the co-founder of Neo-Platonism, was greatly influenced by Ammonius Saccas. Plotinus studied Plato and Aristotle, and borrowed heavily from Stoic cosmology. He also borrowed Neo-Pythagorean ideas from the Greek philosopher Numenius, whose writings were well known by the latter part of the second century.⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, the metaphysical tenets of Neo-Platonism are virtually identical with Neo-Pythagoreanism.

The framework of Neo-Platonism began with the belief that the highest principle, the One, an immaterial and impersonal force, was the ground of all existence from which all else derives. Out of the One comes Mind (*Nous*), the rational principle or divine intelligence of the world similar to Aristotle's Unmoved Mover.⁴⁹⁷ After Mind comes the World Soul that emanates all things. The World Soul exists between Mind and bodily reality and exercises itself in individual souls.⁴⁹⁸ Thus, the human soul, an element of the divine, can turn itself either to the Good or to evil.⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, Plotinus taught that the human soul could by and of itself, without divine aid, 'rise to ecstatic union with the perfect One.'⁵⁰⁰ For Neo-Platonists, the longing to return to the One, leads to salvation. However, in the teachings of Orphism and the Neo-Pythagoreans, achieving union with the One requires a disciplined life. That is, one must commit to a life of strict asceticism, observe the proper rules of conduct, and purify the self from worldly influences that prevent realization of Ultimate Reality. The implication for Neo-Platonists is that the character of individual soul anticipates preexistence and immortality and is subject to reincarnation.⁵⁰¹

The Catechetical School of Alexandria

Biblical evidence places Christians in Alexandria at the time of the Apostles (Acts 18:24).

495 Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 311.

496 D.A. Rees, 'Platonism and the Platonic Tradition' in *The Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, 337.

497 Ibid.

498 Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 312.

499 Ibid.

500 Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World*, New York: NY, 664.

501 Philip Merlan, 'Plotinus' in *The Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, 352. See also, Mead, 'Plotinus on Metempsychosis,' 302.

However, tradition traces the first Christian community there to Mark, sometime in the second half of the first century. While there is no evidence to support this and virtually nothing known about the earliest development of Christianity,⁵⁰² around 175 CE, Alexandria became the home of the first Christian Catechetical School, headed by the converted Stoic philosopher, Pantaeus.⁵⁰³ Only fragments of Pantaeus' writings are extant and thus very little is known about him.⁵⁰⁴ However, it appears that he taught a philosophical interpretation of the traditional apostolic doctrine in which he sought to unify Christian faith with Greek philosophy without incorporating the teachings of the Gnostic's. The Catechetical School catered not only to Christians, but also to Greek and Roman students. Indeed, it was open to anyone wanting to learn and debate the great issues of the day. Teachers at the Alexandrian Catechetical school believed that the study of Greek philosophy and thought combined with other subjects were integral to the study of Christianity. Along with Christianity and philosophy, science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine, were part of the curriculum. An average day at the school began with Socratic-style exercises in logic and dialectic, followed by classes in cosmology, natural history, ethics, and finally, theology proper.⁵⁰⁵

The Catechetical school also attracted a number of notable theologians and thinkers. Pantaeus' most famous student was Clement (A.D. 150- 215) who eventually succeeded him as the head of the school in A.D. 202. Clement sought to convince pagan intellectuals that Christianity is compatible with Greek philosophy and not a religion for the ignorant or superstitious, maintaining that there was only one truth and that truth is found in Plato, Christ, and in Holy Scripture.⁵⁰⁶ He believed that a careful study of Scriptures leads Christians and philosophers to the same truth.⁵⁰⁷ Moreover, borrowing from Moses and the prophets leads the Greeks to these same divinely revealed truths.⁵⁰⁸ While Clement does

502 Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol.2 (Utrecht Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1953), 2.

503 The church historian, Eusebius, mentions that Pantaeus became head of the Alexandrian school '...commenting on the treasures of divine truth, both orally and in his writings.' *HE*, 10.4 Eusebius further states that Pantaeus was distinguished for his learning and held in high esteem for his knowledge of philosophy and for his zealous disposition respecting the divine word. *H.E.*, 10.1.2.

504 Schaff, *History*, 778. J.B. Lightfoot (and later by Pierre Batiffol in *L'Eglise naissante et le catholicisme*) suggests that Pantaeus probably wrote the last two chapters of the early Christian apology, *Epistle to Diognetus*, based on its Alexandrian phraseology and sentiments, among other considerations. See *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed., J.R. Harmer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 248, 249.

505 *Panegyric on Origen* 7.

506 Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), 72, 73.

507 *Ibid.*, 73.

508 *Exhortation* 6; *Strom.* 1:15, 21; 2.5, 11, 14; 6.3

not say so, he draws on tradition found also in Philo and Justin Martyr.⁵⁰⁹ He also believed that Christianity embodied the true philosophy and that it was the true Gnosis or knowledge (illumination). However, he rejected the prevailing Gnostic ideas and particularly those that relegated Christ to a cosmic myth. Indeed, he spent a great deal of time and energy refuting Gnostic ideas.⁵¹⁰ Clement believed that knowledge grew out of faith and is not distinct from it. In particular, and contrary to the determinism taught by many of the Gnostic's, Clement believed that men were free to choose and that true knowledge (both spiritual and mystical) results in right decisions.

Clement was probably the first Christian to assert that the Second Person of the Trinity is strictly co-eternal with the First.⁵¹¹ Clement's explorations of the relationship between faith and reason go further than those of earlier philosopher-theologians such as Justin Martyr. However, even his contributions pale in comparison to the intellectual and literary output of his successor, Origen, surnamed Adamantinus.

Origen: Biblical Scholar, Apologist, Prolific Author

Origen rejected *metempsychosis* largely because he resisted full assimilation of Greek philosophy with his own theological-philosophical thinking. However, given the tremendous influence on the intellectual culture in which Origen lived, it is inevitable that he absorbed some of its ideas. Certainly, aspects of his theology indicate some degree of influence.⁵¹² However, that he investigated an idea or set of propositions does not mean that he assimilated them. As we have suggested, while Origen utilized concepts and language familiar to his audience in order to communicate the Gospel, he rejected ideas foreign to Scripture and the Rule of Faith. Moreover, subject-matter not clearly defined by either of these sources allowed him to speculate. However, he repeatedly stated that his speculative ideas were personal opinion, and not doctrine. Indeed, his Christian upbringing and core beliefs influenced him above everything else.

Origen was born in Alexandria, Egypt around the year 185. He became one of the most prolific thinkers of his time producing volumes unequalled by his contemporaries and arguably, with few exceptions, by others after him.⁵¹³ The biographical details provided by Eusebius, Gregory

509 Joseph W. Trigg, 'Allegory', Everett Ferguson ed. *EEC*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 24. See also, Chadwick, 170.

510 Quasten, *Patrology*, 14.

511 Edwards, *Origen*, 23.

512 Henry Chadwick, 'Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa' *The Journal of Theological Studies* 48. (1947), 39-47.

513 According to Jerome (*Adv. Ruf.* 2, 22), Origen's treatises numbered two thousand. Epiphanius (*Haer* 64, 63) estimates his literary productions at around six thousand. See Quasten, *Patrology*, 43.

Thaumaturgus, and Jerome, indicate that Origen grew up in a Christian home, where his father Leonides, educated him in the Scriptures and in the various schools of Greek thought.⁵¹⁴ He developed a voracious appetite for Scripture with a particular interest in seeking a deeper or esoteric meaning behind the text. However, Eusebius tells us that his father urged that he not go beyond the obvious meaning of the Scriptures.⁵¹⁵ After Leonides' death, during the persecution of Christians under Septimius Severus in 202, Origen turned his attention to the study of philology or the study of language and literature.⁵¹⁶ Eventually he became proficient in the Scriptures and in the literature of the day, and was able to support himself and his family by teaching.

Soon after the persecution of Septimius began, Clement abandoned his post as head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria. It remained vacant until the patriarch Demetrius, appoints Origen, at the young age of 18. It is there that Origen gained fame as a teacher, scholar, and ascetic. From 203 to 231, he taught a variety of courses including theology, which, for Origen, is the summit of philosophical wisdom.⁵¹⁷ However, after his excommunication by the Church of Alexandria for insubordination, he could no longer maintain his position at the school. He relocated to Caesarea where he continued exegetical studies and founded a school of theology. For the next 20 years or so, he devoted himself to teaching and writing, supported in large part, by his good friend Ambrosias. After his imprisonment during the persecution of Emperor Decius in 251, Origen died from wounds received in prison in the city of Tyre some time around 253.

Origen was a prolific writer, producing works on subjects such as textual criticism, exegesis, doctrine, anti-pagan polemics, prayer, biblical interpretation, heresy, and commentaries and homilies on most of the books of the Bible. We note below some of his more important writings, present a brief overview of his theology, and examine several doctrines attributed to Origen that have direct bearing on our topic.⁵¹⁸

Origen's masterpiece was the *Hexapla*, a compilation of six versions of the Jewish Scriptures presented in parallel columns. *On First Principles* (Greek, *Peri Archon*; or the Latin, *De Principiis*), gives us a firsthand look into the mind of this great thinker. While we discuss the complexities surrounding the redaction history of this work in chapter 4, it is nonetheless, the earliest attempt to form a system of Christian doctrine. It consists of four books: Book 1, 'On God' (theology), Book 2,

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁵¹⁵ *H.E.* 6.9.10

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 2.15.

⁵¹⁷ Quasten, *Patrology*, 38.

⁵¹⁸ For a fuller discussion of Origen's writings see, Quasten, Ibid, 43-75; Henry Crouzel, *Origen* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, Ltd., 2000); and, Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans., Robert J. Daley, S.J., *Origen Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 2001.

‘On the World’, (cosmology), Book 3, ‘On the Freedom of the Will’ (anthropology), and, Book 4, ‘On Revelation’ (teleology). Particularly interesting is the preface where Origen reveals the motive and foundation for his thinking. He begins with his deeply held conviction that the basic source of Christian doctrine is the teachings of Christ in the Scriptures and in ecclesiastical or apostolic tradition.⁵¹⁹ However, while Origen considered apostolic teaching authoritative, he recognized that it lacked clarification in certain areas of Christian belief and argued that he was free to explore those unsettled beliefs. In Origen’s view, understanding the nature and task of theology as it relates to Scripture and tradition, is a natural desire of those in the search of divine truth.

The first book of *First Principles*, addresses the heavenly or supernatural world, the oneness of God, the nature of divine spirit, and the relationship of the three divine persons. It ends with a discussion of the origin, nature, and fall of the angels. The second book addresses the material world, the creation of man because of the fall of angels, man as fallen spirits enclosed in material bodies (the perpetuity of bodily nature), the Fall of Adam, and redemption in Christ, the incarnate *Logos*. It concludes with a discussion of the resurrection, the last judgment, and immortal life. The third book deals with the soul’s moral struggle and the tension that exists between free will and personal responsibility. This book also presents the reality of spiritual warfare, focusing on both demonic hindrance and angelical assistance in the believer’s life. The fourth book is a recapitulation of Christian doctrine with additional discussion of Origen’s approach to the threefold meaning or interpretation of Scripture: literal, moral, and spiritual.

Origen probably wrote *On First Principles* at an earlier time in his life around 225 A.D. It remains the major source of criticism because of its sympathy with Platonic and Gnostic ideas.⁵²⁰ However, despite its shortcomings, it was still epoch-making in the history of Christianity.⁵²¹

Origen’s most important apologetic work was *Against Celsus*, written about 248.⁵²² It is the only extant work depicting his engagement in critical rebuttal to major objections raised by an opponent of the Christian faith. Origen’s long time friend, Ambrose, asked him to respond to the treatise *True Discourse*, written by Celsus, around 178. Origen responded to Celsus’ accusations against the Christians with the precision of an apologist and the skill of a seasoned philosopher. Indeed, *Against Celsus* is a unique example of the intellectual exchanges between pagans and Christians in the early

519 *PArch* Praef 1-4

520 Schaff, *History*, 795.

521 Quasten, *Patrology*, 61.

522 For an introduction to this work, see Henry Chadwick, trans. *Origen: Contra Celsum* (London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1953). For additional commentary on Chadwick’s translation see, Viro clarissimo and Petro J.G.A. Hendrix septuagenarios, ‘Notes On Origen, Contra Celsum’ in *Arche: A Collection of Patristic Studies* by J.C.M. Van Winden, eds., J. Den Boeft and D.T. Runia (Leiden, The Netherlands, 1997.), 161-173.

centuries of the Church.

Origen wrote *Stromata* or *Miscellanies* in Alexandria sometime before 231. It was originally composed of ten books but exists today in only three fragments of a Latin translation. His intention was to compare Christian doctrine with the teachings of the various schools of philosophy.⁵²³ *On the Resurrection*, also lost, exists only in the form of fragments quoted by those opposed to Origen's view of the resurrection body.⁵²⁴ This treatise originally appeared in Alexandria probably before 230, before he began his work *On First Principles*.⁵²⁵

Origen's Theology

Our discussion of Origen's theology will focus on those aspects which have direct bearing on the question of whether he believed in *metempsychosis*. Origen's views regarding asceticism, baptism, the Eucharist, and prayer, for example, do not depend on his eschatological scheme. Conversely, his doctrines of cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology weave together to form his Christian worldview. Moreover, Origen's conception of creation has direct bearing on his doctrines of freedom, the fall, judgment, and *apokatastasis*. Finally, Origen's anthropology has direct bearing on his doctrines of resurrection and the afterlife.

Examining Origen's theology holistically will help determine the way in which he uses or interacts with the prevailing philosophies of the day. Moreover, the degree to which he depends on Greek philosophy is determined by his Christian upbringing, the authority of the Scriptures, and the Rule of Faith, as they influence him first. As we have stressed, his speculative doctrines of preexistence of souls, *apokatastasis*, and universal salvation, are matters of personal opinion, and not considered doctrine.

In this consideration of Origen's theology, I shall argue that while Origen's doctrine of resurrection influences the Christian debate over the nature or *mode* of the resurrection body, it certainly does not depend on reincarnation. Indeed, while it was heavily scrutinized, it does not deny the resurrection.⁵²⁶ Moreover, while Origen's view is different from the orthodox, it obviously had no affinity with reincarnation. In order to demonstrate this, we will discuss his doctrine of the resurrection body in some detail.

Origen's theology did not arise from a vacuum; Scripture influenced him foremost. He was

⁵²³ Jerome, *Epist.* 70.4

⁵²⁴ Pamphilus (*Apol Pro Orig.* 7); Methodius of Olympus (*De resurr.*); Jerome (*Contra Joh. Hier* 25-26).

⁵²⁵ *H.E.* 6.24.2

⁵²⁶ For a treatment of the subject with reference to Origen's specific view, see Lynn Elvin Boliek, *The Resurrection of the Flesh: a Study of a Confessional Phrase* (Drukkerij En Uitgeverij Jacob Van Campen: Amsterdam, 1962).

convinced that the Scriptures were divinely inspired and that the Holy Spirit is their author.⁵²⁷ They originated with God, not with man, and Christ was the key to understanding them.⁵²⁸ Indeed, Origen believed that all Scripture was the revelation of Christ, the divine Logos, the Word of God. Therefore, preaching the Word of God is to preach Christ.⁵²⁹ However, while he was wholly devoted to Scripture, his use of allegory tended to undermine the historicity of many passages. For example, he denied the literal existence of Adam and Eve and considered the Gospel narratives suspect.⁵³⁰ However, Origen's knowledge of the New Testament, particularly his grasp of both John and Paul, reveal his profound command of the text. His dependence on their writings when interpreting the Old Testament is obvious.⁵³¹ Moreover, he was convinced that the Bible takes precedent over all other writings of the day. Indeed, because of his deep desire to communicate the truths of Scripture, he developed a theology of the Church at a time when doctrine was not so clear.

When Origen wrote *First Principles*, he already possessed an intellectual acumen that set him apart from most of his contemporaries. He never stopped thinking, examining, and pushing the boundaries. If a doctrine was unclear in Scripture or the Rule of Faith, he was compelled to explore it even if it was outside the pale of *normal* Christian thinking. As was the practice of the day, Origen interpreted the Bible within the framework of Greek philosophy. However, because he borrowed Greek terms to describe God and other Christian doctrine, some considered him to be a Platonist.⁵³² For the same reason some assume that, he embraced transmigration. Indeed, some passages in Origen's works do seem to suggest that he embraced it. However, when read in context, these passages actually demonstrate that he clearly rejected transmigration!⁵³³ While he investigated the subject of *metempsychosis*, and finds aspects of it appealing, he rejected the concept on the basis of Scripture.

While Origen describes God's oneness using philosophical terms, he also sees him as loving and caring, and having aspects of personality. He also understood God to be distant yet immanent through the Son (Logos) and through his providential working in the world.⁵³⁴ However, Origen warns against the use of anthropomorphism or assigning materiality to the nature of God, because he is, by nature,

527 *PArch* 1.*Praef*.4; 1.3.1; 4.2.7; 4.3.14; *CCels* 3.3; 5.60; *ComMt* 14.4; *HomGn* 7.1

528 *PArch* 4.1.2-3; *HomIs* 1.5; *SerMt* 28.54.119

529 Mark Sheridan, 'Scripture,' in *The Westminster Handbook*, 200.

530 *PArch*, 4.1.16

531 McGuckin, *The Westminster*, 10, 11.

532 Edwards, *Origen*, 47.

533 MacGregor, *Reincarnation*, 55.

534 *PArch* 3.3.5

incorporeal.⁵³⁵ In this way Origen repudiates both the pantheistic and dualistic concepts of God as held by the Greeks and the Gnostic's.⁵³⁶ Indeed, Origen's concept of God derives from Scripture. Moreover, he argued that the God of the Bible is radically different from the pagan concept of God.⁵³⁷

Scholars question whether Origen intended to develop his own cosmology.⁵³⁸ However, he was convinced that as long as he refrained from arriving at fixed definitions on the subject, he should investigate it.⁵³⁹ He therefore presents a cosmology that integrates aspects of philosophical thought with Christian belief. Origen's cosmology is summed up this way: before the creation of the material, bodily world, God creates a finite number of rational, immortal souls through the agency of the divine Logos.⁵⁴⁰ These preexistent souls or intelligence's (*noes*) are in complete harmony and unity with God through the agency of the Son, but through the exercise of free will, they fall away 'through a cooling of their ardor.'⁵⁴¹ Therefore, God provides a place in the cosmos for these souls to undergo a process of rehabilitation. God therefore, gives them bodies to live in the world that they might learn to find their way back to him. The world then, is a place where pedagogic soteriology plays out through the exercise of free choice and where souls advance spiritually or fall farther away.⁵⁴² Thus, souls can fail miserably or restore to the unity that they had with God before their fall.⁵⁴³ Nevertheless, Origen envisions a time when all rational creatures and the creation itself, are reconciled to God. He refers to this as the *apokatastasis* or 'restoration' – the eternal return of creation to God. His view differs with many Christians who see the end of history as the final stage of a grand revelation of God. Origen interprets creation and salvation as a process in which the divine image in humanity unites again with the Creator.⁵⁴⁴

While Origen's theology is sometimes difficult to figure out, he was obviously trying to integrate

535 *PArch* 1.1.1-4; 3.6.1

536 *CCels* 4.14

537 *PArch* I.1.1-4; 3.6.1ff. Origen also cites Colossians 1:15 and John 1:18 to support his view of God's incorporeality (*PArch* 1.1.8).

538 Fiona Thompson 'Cosmology' in *The Westminster Handbook*, 83.

539 *PArch* I.6.1

540 *PArch* 1-2; *ComJn* 1.92

541 Thompson, 84.

542 *Ibid.*, 85.

543 *PArch* I.6.1-2; 3.6.1.3

544 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity, and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 133.

philosophy while remaining true to Scripture. He appears to be interested in the idea of pedagogic salvation which in other systems of thought involves giving the soul another chance, doesn't really want to go down that route, but is walking a fine line which makes his writings sometimes ambiguous. The fact that his theology is a work in progress, should not surprise anyone that some of his views seem to border on heresy.

Preexistence of Souls

Scholars disagree whether Origen embraced preexistence of souls.⁵⁴⁵ Some argue that he subscribed to Plato's doctrine of preexistence, while others maintain that it was simply a subject of inquiry. Then, some argue that Origen never embraced it except in a 'vestigial form' and that it was not heretical.⁵⁴⁶ However, preexistence does always imply transmigration of souls. As we shall see, Origen tried to get around this by interpreting the fall of souls (intelligence's) and the form of their embodiment as a result of the deeds committed in previous lives, but of the gravity of their fall. Indeed, some souls received celestial bodies, some became angels or demons, while others received human bodies. However, this does not amount to repeated migrations of the soul into human bodies. Origen taught rather, that through the process of embodiment, the soul acquires self-knowledge about its original state; it did not need to migrate to other bodies.⁵⁴⁷

Origen's belief in preexistence of souls is often misunderstood. For instance, he believed that 'intelligence's' become souls after their fall, not before. Moreover, although Origen believed in the preexistence of souls, it refers to a previous existence in some higher realm, not on earth. Additionally, Origen considered preexistence of souls speculative, and not doctrine. His theory of pre-existence is essentially a counter-response to the Valentinian and Marcionite theory of the origin of the soul.⁵⁴⁸ That is, Origen rejected the determinism of the Gnostic's by arguing that all rational creatures are equal and have personal responsibility.

Rather than blaming God for man's infirmities, Origen taught that all men possess free will.⁵⁴⁹ and

⁵⁴⁵ Edwards, *Origen*, 89. The scholarly journal, *Origeniana Quarta*, includes several of entries related to the subject of Origen and the preexistence of the soul. See *Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses* (Innsbruck, 2-6., September 1985), herausgegeben von Lothar Lies, 1987. For example, in the article, 'The Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence' (258-264), Gerald Bostock argues that Origen based his doctrine of preexistence not on Plato, but on Philo and his Judaic interpretation of the Bible.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Roukema, 'Souls' in *The Westminster Handbook*, 202.

⁵⁴⁸ Henry Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A.S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 107.

⁵⁴⁹ *PArch* I.4; I.5; 3.1

that God is good and does not cause evil.⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, Origen's entire cosmology underscores God's providence and human freedom. That is, while God provides the means for restitution, all rational creatures are free to contemplate the divine, and thus enabled to return to their original fellowship with him. Obviously, Origen's theory of preexistence of souls does not depend upon Platonic or Pythagorean concepts of reincarnation.

Apokatastasis

Some scholars argue that Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* bears striking similarities with the structural metaphysics of Plotinus.⁵⁵¹ While at first sight, it appears that it does, a closer examination reveals important distinctions. Moreover, criticisms of Origen's doctrines seem to arise largely as a result of misconceptions about him.⁵⁵² Yet, Origen states, for example, that his attitude towards final restoration is not doctrine.⁵⁵³ His use of *apokatastasis*, stems from his examination of apocalyptic passages in the Bible and from his understanding of death, salvation, and immortality.⁵⁵⁴ Origen believed that salvation (or restoration), was not just a cosmological process; it was the direct result of God's loving, saving, action. Indeed, his entire theology is soteriologically driven. Again, *apokatastasis* does not imply universal salvation, as his critics claim. Contrary to Jerome,⁵⁵⁵ Rufinus,⁵⁵⁶ and others, Origen did not believe in the salvation of the devil and other evil spirits.⁵⁵⁷

The first misunderstanding stems from the definition of the term *apokatastasis*- a term that neo-Gnostics claim to be a direct reference to reincarnation. However, when Origen referred to *apokatastasis*, he assumed that those who heard it understood what he meant.⁵⁵⁸ Most second-century Christian works indicate that the term *apokatastasis* generally means the "attainment" or "realization"

550 *CCels* 6.55

551 Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 115.

552 Crouzel, 235.

553 *PArch* I.6.3; *ComJn* 28.8

554 *SerMt* 32-60; *ComMt* 17.29; *PArch* 3.6.6.9; *DialHer* 24f

555 *Apol adv Ruf* 2.1.8.

556 *De Adult Libr Orig* [PG 17.624-625]

557 See his 'Letter to Friends in Alexandria' as cited in Daley, *The Hope*, 59.

558 *Jo* I.16.91

of a goal.⁵⁵⁹ Indeed, Origen claimed no originality for the term but cites Paul as his authority.⁵⁶⁰ Because of this, scholars question Origen's understanding of restoration.⁵⁶¹ For example, did he mean that restoration was incorporeal, pantheistic, or universal in scope.⁵⁶² Probably not in that Origen's concept of restoration seems to refer to a state of corporeality, since God alone, possess incorporeality: he believed that there is a time when the corruptible body will rise incorruptible.⁵⁶³ Moreover, Origen believed that restoration was not pantheistic: he opposed the materialistic pantheism of the Stoics, which taught that all creatures would be reabsorbed into God. Rather, Origen believed that an incorporeal being was not subject to a conflagration, nor does a man's soul dissolve into fire.⁵⁶⁴ Again, Origen believed that final restoration was not universal because it did not include the devil and other evil spirits. Nevertheless, whatever Origen meant by *apokatastasis*, there is no conclusive evidence that he embraced the radical form often associated with his name.⁵⁶⁵

Recurrent World's Theory

Origen's also posits a recurrent world's theory similar to the Stoics. However, they advanced a theory of eternal recurrence long before he did. The Stoic notion held that given sufficient time, the material particles of a deterministic universe of matter and motion repeated form patterns that have existed before.⁵⁶⁶ While their theory probably influenced Origen's, his view was different. Unlike the Stoics, who regarded time as "something between being and non-being," and the Gnostic's, "who view time as having no complete reality," Origen's notion of time constitutes the core of his entire philosophy.⁵⁶⁷ That is, his theory of time derived from theological principles rather than philosophical ideas.⁵⁶⁸ However, Justinian and Jerome falsely attributed the possibility of future falls, and of future

⁵⁵⁹ Daley, 58.

⁵⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. The Greek word is found in this form only once in the New Testament in Acts 3:21.

⁵⁶¹ Crouzel, 258.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ *PArch* Praef.5

⁵⁶⁴ *CCels* 7.71

⁵⁶⁵ Sachs, John R., SJ, 'Apokatastasis in Patristic Theology' *Theological Studies* 54, no. 4 (Dec. 1993): 617-640.

⁵⁶⁶ Tzamalikos, Panayiotis. 'Origen and the Stoic View of Time' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1991): 535-561.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

worlds, to Origen, nonetheless.⁵⁶⁹ Despite their accusations, Origen's writings clearly demonstrate that he rejected an endless cycle of falls and redemption.⁵⁷⁰

Because Origen read philosophy through theology, the Alexandrian culture challenged his thinking, especially as he interacted with contemporary religious and philosophical ideas of the day. He was especially interested in examining the compatibility of their ideas with the Christian faith. However, because he subjected his thinking to Scripture and to the Rule of Faith, he managed to resist the urge to assimilate their ideas, particularly, their doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

Getting a sense of who Origen was and whether he said the things that he did, means that one must examine whether his extant writings are reliable. We will therefore examine in chapter 4, Origen texts, translations, and their reliability.

CHAPTER 4

⁵⁶⁹ *Ep ad Menam*, fr.16; *Ep 124 ad Avitum* 5.10

⁵⁷⁰ *ComRm* 5.10

ORIGEN TEXTS, TRANSLATIONS, AND THEIR RELIABILITY

Discussing Origen texts, translations, and their reliability, requires that we identify and then then access the current literature on Origen. This will help distinguish between credible, scholarly research on Origen and transmigration, and neo-Gnostic literature that cites Origen's writings in order to support their revisionist Church history. We categorize the current literature on Origen and reincarnation in four major headings: 1) Online translations of Origen's Works; 2) Recent books or publications on Origen; 3) Contemporary Neo-Gnostic or Pro-Christian Reincarnationism Sources; and, 4) Contemporary Bibliographies on Origen and Reincarnation

Online Translations of Origen's Works

Several on-line sources that publish Origen's *First Principles* and *Contra Celsus*. They are: 1.) Ante-and Post-Nicene Fathers at Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL).⁵⁷¹ As the website indicates, the volumes available in this electronic edition of the Early Church Fathers series, have been carefully proofed and converted to ThML by CCEL staff and volunteers. It appears that Book IV of *First Principles* is incomplete on the CCEL. 2.) Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4 which includes Origen, at the Tertullian Project.⁵⁷² This source includes collections of ancient and modern material primarily on the Latin Father Tertullian and English translations of Origen's *On Prayer* and *Philocalia*. Roger Pearse edits the website. 3.) Church Fathers at New Advent.⁵⁷³ This website documents a variety of sources including the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Church Fathers, *Summa Theologica*, and the Bible. Included in the Church Fathers section is a lengthy discussion on Origen and Origenism. It also provides a biography and review of Origen's works, as well as commentary on posthumous influences and the Origenists crises. 4.) The Works of Origen at Early Christian Writings.⁵⁷⁴ Early Christian Writings is the most complete collection of Christian texts dating before the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. This site provides translations and commentary on the New Testament, Apocrypha, Gnostic's, Church Fathers, and some non-Christian references. The "Early Christian Writings: New Testament, Apocrypha, Gnostic's, Church Fathers" site is copyrighted by Peter Kirby.

As we have already mentioned that Book IV of *First Principles* is incomplete in both the CCEL and the Tertullian Project websites. However, both sites include complete, hyperlinked footnotes, while the

⁵⁷¹ <http://www.cel.org/fathers.html>

⁵⁷² <http://www.tertullian.org/>

⁵⁷³ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>

⁵⁷⁴ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>

New Advent and Early Christian Writings do not.⁵⁷⁵

Recent Books or Publications on Origen

The recent recovery of Origen's exegetical legacy has given rise to numerous scholarly publications in the early 1990's and into the new millennium. However, there are far too many to mention here and so we will limit our overview to just a few.⁵⁷⁶ Elizabeth Clark, a patristic scholar and founder of the Department of Religion at Mary Washington College, has a "depth of scholarship and linguistic ability to make available to an educated but non-specialized readership an intriguing mosaic of opinions." Clark published *The Origenist Controversy: the Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton University Press, 1992). Clark discusses in detail, the relationships between some of leading church figures during the late fourth century. She also discusses the influence of the radical teachings of Evagrius to the followers of Origen pointing out that the intellectual Origenist monks of the Egyptian desert did not accept Bishop Theophilus' condemnations. As we mention in Chapter 2, a number of more notable figures fled the controversy along with some 300 other Origenist monks, who continued to practice their beliefs in Palestine and Syria into the sixth century when Origenism was finally condemned.

Ronald E. Heine, professor of Bible and Theology at Puget Sound Christian College, has contributed several important works on Origen in recent years. In 2001, he translated Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Books 1-10 (Fathers of the Church Patristic Series- Catholic University of America Press). In 2006, he translated Books 13-32. In 2003, Heine translated the *Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford Early Christian Studies- Oxford University Press). Heine also published, *Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford University Press, 2011). Heine provides a chronological treatment of Origen's works, interacts with the most recent scholarship on Origen, and then goes into great detail regarding the complexities of language associated with his [Origen's] work. Heine also addresses recent studies of Alexandria and Caesarea in order to provide a clear context in which Origen lived and worked.

Thomas Scheck is a Senior Fellow of The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, and an Assistant Professor in Pastoral Theology at the Ave Maria University Institute for Pastoral Theology. He has authored several important works on Origen. *Origen and the History of Justification* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), is considered by many to be an important work in Patristic, biblical interpretation, and historical theology. Scheck demonstrates that Origen not only plays a formative role

⁵⁷⁵ See John S. Uebersax, *Early Christianity and Reincarnation: Modern Misrepresentation of Quotes by Origen*, located at: <http://john-uebersax.com/plato/origen1.htm>.

⁵⁷⁶ We note also that every four years, leading scholars of Origen gather for an international conference on various aspects of his life, writings, and influence. See Appendix C for a listing of these meetings.

in Pauline exegesis, but contributes to the development of justification as held in western Christian tradition. Scheck also published, *Apology for Origen: On the Falsification of the Books of Origen by Rufinus* (Fathers of the Church Patristic Series- Catholic University Press, 2010). Here, for the first time, is an English translation (from Rufinus' Latin version) of the *Apology for Origen* - the sole surviving work of St. Pamphilus of Caesarea (d. 310 AD). In 2002, Scheck published the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 6-10* (Fathers of the Church Series - Catholic University of America Press).

Peter Martens, Assistant Professor for Theological Studies at Saint Louis University, published *Origen and Scripture: Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Martens examines Origen's approach to the Bible through his personal approach or attitude in life. Martens also explores Origen's thinking as it directly affects his scriptural interpretation, which dictates his contemplation of God.

Panayiotis Tzamalikos is Professor of Philosophy at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He has published extensively on Origen, primarily in both Patristic Thought and Greek Philosophy. Some of his books include *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology* (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, Brill, 2007), *The Concept of Time in Origen* (Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 1991), and *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). Among his many articles are, "Origen: The Source of Augustine's Theory of Time", "Origen and the Stoic View of Time", "Creation ex nihilo in Origen", "The Autonomy of the Stoic View of Time", and "The Concept of matter in Plato's Timaeus." Tzamalikos examines Origen's eschatology and arguing that his position is in stark contrast with the contemporary classical Greek philosophy and Hellenistic thought. He also refutes the notion that Origen dissolves history into intellectual abstraction and that his eschatology is obscure. Tzamalikos draws on a wide range of bibliographic material regarding Origen's philosophy of history and eschatology including sources in Classical and Late Antiquity, Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, and Patristic thought.

Other important contributors to Origen studies include such authors as R.P.C. Hanson,⁵⁷⁷ John A. McGuckin,⁵⁷⁸ Fred Norris,⁵⁷⁹ Mark J. Edwards,⁵⁸⁰ Benjamin Blosser,⁵⁸¹ Anthony Grafton and Megan

⁵⁷⁷ *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Joseph W. Trigg (reprint: Nashville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

⁵⁷⁸ *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

⁵⁷⁹ "Origen," in *The early Christian World*, ed. P.F. Esler (New York: Routledge, 2000) 2: 1005-1026.

⁵⁸⁰ *Origen against Plato*, Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

⁵⁸¹ *Become like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

Williams,⁵⁸² and, Alistar Stewart-Skykes.⁵⁸³

Pro-Christian Reincarnationism Sources

As we pointed out earlier, pro-reincarnation books and varieties of publications first appear in the 1870's and then soon after the turn of the century primarily with those sympathetic with the Theosophical Society,⁵⁸⁴ Swedenborgianism,⁵⁸⁵ and in the westernization of various Eastern-based religions in America.⁵⁸⁶ While we cannot present them all, a few are worth mentioning. In 1961, Joseph Head and Sylvia L. Cranston published, *Reincarnation: an east-west anthology* (Wheaton, ILL: Theosophical Publishing House). It includes a series of quotations from the literature of the world's religions and from over 400 western thinkers. It quickly became one of the most authoritative books produced from a pro-reincarnation position. Indeed, most pro-reincarnation publications today cite their references as primary source material.

Geddes MacGregor (1909-1998), was a Scottish-American educator and former Professor of Philosophy of Religion, Dean of USC Graduate School of Religion. He is the author of several books and articles. His book, *Reincarnation in Christianity: a New Vision of the Role of Rebirth in Christian Thought* (Wheaton, ILL: Quest Books, 1978), is a landmark work on the subject of Christianity and reincarnation. In it, MacGregor discusses Jewish thought during the three centuries before Jesus, the early Christian faith, and several of the early Church Fathers teachings. He also discusses the first councils of the Church in order to demonstrate that "Christian doctrine and reincarnation are not mutually exclusive belief systems." MacGregor maintained that the Church never condemned the idea of reincarnation and that the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory sufficiently explains it. MacGregor's *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982.) is also worth noting. MacGregor suggests that the biblical promise of resurrection is a promise of a *form* of reincarnation. MacGregor presents a case for exploring ways of understanding the concept of reincarnation by tracing its adherence in both the New Testament and Patristic witness, and then discusses both the philosophical and theological objections to reincarnation.

In 1974, Quincy Howe, Jr., former Professor of Classics at Scripts College in Claremont, CA,

582 *Christianity and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2006).

583 "On the Lord's Prayer" trans and annotated by Alistar Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 111-214.

584 Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, William Quan Judge, and others, officially formed the Theosophical Society in New York City in 1875.

585 Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish scientist, philosopher, theologian, and mystic. After Swedenborg's death, a number of individuals produced various interpretations of his theology.

586 Barrows, *ibid*.

published *Reincarnation for the Christian* (Wheaton, ILL: The Theosophical publishing House). Howe's starting point is that one may embrace reincarnation and remain a Christian. Howe argues that several Bible passages supports reincarnation, traces the evolution of Christian thought on the subject, and then discusses its eventual rejection by Church authorities. We could present additional sources claiming that Origen embraced reincarnation. However, in Chapter 2, we will present a through discussion of both pro-reincarnation and anti-reincarnation scholarship in recent years.

Contemporary Bibliographies on Origen and Reincarnation

Because of the Internet, we have access to several online bibliographies and other publications on Origen. While some sources are more extensive than others are, most of them include references to Origen and reincarnation. Joel Bjorling published a comprehensive listing of literature on reincarnation in *Reincarnation: a Bibliography* in the Series: Sects and Cults in America (Book 874) in 1995.⁵⁸⁷ His work contains a comprehensive listing of literature on reincarnation and karma. Bjorling includes chapters on reincarnation in Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism), in comparative religions and philosophy, in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, cases of reincarnation, past-life therapy, astrology and reincarnation, popular works, reincarnation in literature, and reference works.

Lynn Kear published *Reincarnation: a Selected Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press) in 1996. Kear documents some 500 books with full bibliographic information as well as a description of their contents. The author also provides pro- and anti-reincarnation sources on the subject. Again, this book is a valuable resource because it provides references to the most cited books on reincarnation.⁵⁸⁸

The Eileen J. Garrett Library located in Greenport, New York, houses a PF Bibliography (No. 34) on the subject of reincarnation and includes numerous sources on ancient belief and modern evidence from the world religions, philosophy, and the sciences. The bibliography is also available online.⁵⁸⁹

In 2006, John Uebersax published a critical analysis of early Christianity and reincarnation entitled, "Early Christianity and Reincarnation: Modern Misrepresentation of Quotes by Origen".⁵⁹⁰ His bibliography includes primary source material and modern studies on the subject of Origen and reincarnation. Uebersax also presents many of the miss-quotations of Origen by modern neo-Gnostics in order to prove that he embraced reincarnation.

⁵⁸⁷ The publisher is Routledge, a member of Taylor & Francis Group LLC, a leading academic publisher in the Humanities and Social Sciences located in Florence, KY.

⁵⁸⁸ This work is online at, www.worldcat.org/title/reincarnation.

⁵⁸⁹ See, www.parapsychology/dynamic/info/pfbib34.pdf

⁵⁹⁰ See [://john-uebersax.com/plato/origen1.html](http://john-uebersax.com/plato/origen1.html), *ibid*

The website “What Early Christians Believed About Reincarnation,” presents a topical selection on the subject of Christianity and reincarnation.⁵⁹¹ Volume IV, documents the writings of the Anti-Nicene Fathers which includes a thorough section on Origen.

Finally, the Reincarnation Research website provides a bibliography on reincarnation as represented by the world religions.⁵⁹² Its authors suggests that both the New Testament and some of the early fathers’ espoused reincarnation, even though several Bible passages seem to contradict it. The authors also include biblical references that both support and contradict reincarnation. Additionally, this site documents, in some detail, Christian authorities and published author’s views on reincarnation.

While our overview is by no means exhaustive, it does demonstrate that the current literature on Origen is available in many different formats. As a result, we are able to discuss with more clarity, the Origen texts, translations, and their reliability.

If Origen embraced transmigration of souls, one would assume that it would be obvious in his writings. However, he rarely discusses the subject, and when he does, rather than embracing it, he argues that it is not compatible with Christian belief. Moreover, Origen’s notion of salvation and the afterlife have no dependency on transmigration. We believe that while some Origen passages seem to imply transmigration, if read in context, they reject it.

The Alexandrian culture in which Origen lived is home to traditional Greek religion and philosophy, Pythagorean and Orphic schools of thought, Neo-Platonism, and varieties of Gnostic schools. The prominent Jewish figure, Philo, reside there as well. He combines elements of both Jewish and Hellenistic thinking in his teaching. Alexandria is also the place where the great thinkers of the day debate new ideas. Indeed, Alexandria is by all accounts, home to religious and philosophical syncretism and the place where transmigration theories thrive.

Because transmigration theories enjoy immense popularity in Alexandria, neo-Gnostics assume that Origen embraced some form of it. However, determining whether this is true or not, requires an examination of Origen’s extant writings along with Rufinus’ and Jerome’s accounts on the subject, along with other pertinent sources.⁵⁹³ Additionally, due consideration of modern scholarly opinion and their editorial policies will help determine the way that Origen’s views on transmigration may be read. The results will demonstrate that a proper reading of the texts will either support or refute the argument that Origen embraced transmigration.

Numerous neo-Gnostic references to Origen and transmigration in early Christianity, suggests that there exists substantial commentary on the subject. However, there are only a handful of instances

591 See, www.bible.ca/h-reincarnation.html

592 See, www.reincarnation-research.com/bibliography.html

593 See, Pamphilus’s *Apology for Origen* 87 (PG 17.579b), Jerome’s *Epistulae* 124.4, Justinian’s *Letter to Menas*, and Photius’s *Bibliotheca* 117, as cited in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, John Anathony McGuckin, ed., 205.

where Origen actually discusses transmigration. In every case, he consistently rejects transmigration because he determined that it was incompatible with Christian belief. While Origen regarded transmigration of souls as a “theoretical” possibility in some future world, he did not view it as church dogma. On several occasions Origen clearly stated that his speculative views were not intended to be interpreted as doctrinal certainty. Indeed, on one occasion, he admitted that he was merely addressing questions and problems related to transmigration.⁵⁹⁴ His attitude is obvious both in his response to a Christian sect embracing transmigration and in his defense of Christian belief against the attacks of Celsus, a pagan wishing to discredit basic Christian doctrine. Details outlined in *First Principles*, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, and in *Against Celsus*,⁵⁹⁵ demonstrate that Origen clearly rejected transmigration of souls.

Neo-Gnostic authors typically cite *First Principles* for proof that Origen embraced transmigration. *First Principles* is Origen’s earliest and most monumental work and arguably the first attempt by a Christian, to formulate a coherent system of Christian philosophy. While only a few fragments of the original Greek are extant, we possess Rufinus’ Latin translation, which, in an effort to protect Origen’s reputation, is fraught with editorial liberties. Indeed, his translation glosses over and even omits some of the problematic areas of Origen’s theology. However, most scholars consider it a good translation.⁵⁹⁶ We also possess Jerome’s translation of *First Principles*. Jerome and Rufinus are good friends but become bitter enemies because of their respective views of Origen. Before they engage in heated debate over Origen, both men desired to make Greek theology accessible to the Latin world. Accordingly, their fascination with Origen resulted in their translating several of his works. Contrary to Rufinus, Jerome considered Origen’s teachings heretical.⁵⁹⁷ He strongly disagreed with Rufinus’ translation of *First Principles* and produced his own translation, which, unfortunately, has not survived. Jerome’s translation is as biased as Rufinus’ translation because he was determined at the outset to expose Origen’s deviation from orthodoxy.⁵⁹⁸

The noted French priest Jacques Paul Migne (1800-1875) first published an inexpensive and widely distributed text of the early fathers including Origen’s *First Principles* (PG 11-17). While he produced

594 *First Principles* 1.8.4

595 Ibid. For a detailed discussion see, H. Gorgemanns and H. Karpp, *Origenes. Vier Bucker von den Prinzipien*, (Daarmstadt: 1985), 265.

596 See for example, Herbert Musurillo, “The Recent Revival of Origen Studies” in *Theological Studies*, Vol. 24, June 1963, 250-263.

597 See, *Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum*, 7 where he is less than kind towards Origen. However, his *Fragment of Letter 33* to Paula is more sympathetic towards him.

598 Gordon S. Wakefield, “Perfection” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: PA: 1983), 297-299.

one of the largest collections of patristic literature to date, more critical edited versions such as the *Origenes Werke* series,⁵⁹⁹ and Crouzel and Simonetti's English translation of Rufinus' Latin text, published in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series, replaced it.⁶⁰⁰ Of monumental importance is Paul Koetschau's critical edition of *De Principiis*, published in 1913. His reconstruction of *First Principles*, from Greek and Latin quotations, while problematic, is one of the greatest contributions in modern Patristic scholarship. Despite this, Koetschau's attitude toward Rufinus' translation is apparent from the outset. His *Introduction* reveals that he distrusted a number of passages, which lead him to dismiss Rufinus' translation as unreliable.⁶⁰¹ As a result, his edition is full of conjecture. While he consulted the original Greek fragments and relied to some extent on Rufinus' translation, he drew inferences from a variety of other sources presumed to have doctrinal parallels with Origen's original thinking.⁶⁰² Indeed, Koetschau interjected extra-Origen sources in his translation in order to satisfy his bias towards Origen. For example, he cites Justinian's letter to Menas in order to prove that Origen believed in the spherical resurrection of bodies.⁶⁰³ However, many scholars have questioned whether this is Origen's attitude.⁶⁰⁴ Koetschau's fragment 15 identifies several sources alleging that Origen traced the soul's alliance with the body to a primordial transgression.⁶⁰⁵ Again, Koetschau forces later sources into the text for proof of Origen when there is no justification for doing so.⁶⁰⁶ One more example will suffice: in Rufinus' translation of *First Principles* (Book 2), Koetschau inserts a parallel quote from Epiphanius' *panarion haer*, where Origen allegedly asserts, "pure, rational beings are...condensed into

599 GCS 22. *Origenes Werke V. De principiis*, (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913)

600 See *De principiis*: Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, eds., *Origène: Traité des principes*, 5 vols., Sources Chrétiennes 252 (Books 1-2), 253 (Commentaries and fragments of Books 1-2), 268 (Books 3-4), 269 (Commentary on and fragments from Books 3-4), 312 (index) (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978-1984).

601 Koetschau, G.C.S., Origen v, Introduction, cxxviii-cxxxv as cited in R.P.C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1954), 41.

602 See Ronnie J. Rombs, "A Note on the Status of Origen's *De Principiis* in English," *Vigiliae Christiannae*, Vol. 61, No.1 (2007), 21-29.

603 # 918 Mansi IX. 516 D, cited originally by Koetschau in his edition of *De Principiis* (1913), 176. As referenced by Henry Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body" in the *Harvard Theological Review*, April 1948, 97.

604 Ibid, 95.

605 Koetschau, *First Principles*, 96 as cited by Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 91.

606 Ibid. For numerous other examples, see *Origen on first Principles: being Koetschau's Text of the De Principiis Translated into English, Together with an Introduction and Notes* by G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishers, Inc., 1973). See also, Rowan A. Greer, *Origen an Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV Prologue to the Commentary on the Songs of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 198-215.

souls...”⁶⁰⁷ Koetschau takes the liberty to correct Rufinus knowing full well that he viewed Origen’s perception of the soul as “particularly objectionable.”⁶⁰⁸

G.W. Butterworth translated Koetschau’s edition into English in 1936. However, newer editions based on this one are available including the aforementioned Crouzel and Simonetti translation of *De Principiis* as well as other Italian and German translations.⁶⁰⁹

Because we possess only a few Greek fragments of Origen, we rely essentially on Rufinus’ translation, which is also problematic because it too reflects bias towards Origen. However, despite the editorial liberties inherent in both Koetschau and Rufinus’ translations, determining which one faithfully represents Origen on transmigration rests on whether they may be trusted. Our view is because Koetschau’s translation is fraught with conjecture and emendations, it cannot be trusted and is therefore, unreliable. Rufinus’ translation reflects similar concerns. The question is, to what extent can Rufinus’s translation be trusted and is it reliable.

German and Protestant scholars, before the 1930’s, have been “deeply suspicious” of Rufinus’ translation.⁶¹⁰ However, recent scholarship has addressed many of the issues surrounding this translation.⁶¹¹ Indeed, the eradication of the more problematic areas surrounding modern translations, has given some degree of confidence in them.⁶¹² Additionally, modern scholarship has demonstrated that the Latin text repudiates the justification for merging Greek citations.⁶¹³ While German translations retain some of these fragments,⁶¹⁴ Crouzel and Simonetti’s French edition of *Peri Archon* has removed them.⁶¹⁵ Because of this, the reliability of Rufinus’ translation is far less uncertain.

While Rufinus’ translation suffers from omissions, Koetschau’s translation suffers from both

607 See the Latin text as cited in *Agape and Eros*, Anders Nygren, Philip S. Watson, Trans., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 383.

608 Ibid. Nygren admits in the same footnote that while there are many gaps in this chapter, “...the ‘anathemas,’ pronounced by the Synod of Constantinople, 553, against Origen’s teachings, supply information about the passages Rufinus has suppressed.”

609 See Footnote 918.

610 Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 4.

611 Despite the Rufinian glosses, they all agree that it is still a reliable source for Origen’s thought.

612 See Ronnie J. Rombs, “A Note on the Status of Origen’s *De Principiis* in English,” *Vigiliae Christiannae*, Vol. 61, No.1 (2007), 21-29.

613 Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic*, Ibid., 545.

614 See H. Karpp and H. Gorgemanns, *Origenes. Vier Bucher von den Prinzipien* (Darmstadt 1976) as cited in Kannengiesser, Ibid.

615 Ibid.

omissions and interpolations. Despite these shortcomings, Henry Crouzel concludes: ‘Comparisons of the texts in the *Philocalia* [containing about 1/7 of the Greek text of *First Principles*] with Rufinus’ work yields on the whole a favorable result.’⁶¹⁶ Again, we agree that Rufinus’ translation, discrepancies notwithstanding, corroborates with independent Greek sources and is therefore more reliable than Koetschau’s translation. This is also the attitude of most reputable Origenist scholars.⁶¹⁷ For example, Thomas Scheck argues that many underestimate Rufinus’ significance as a translator.⁶¹⁸ K.H. Schelkle questions whether the traditional suspicions of Rufinus are correct⁶¹⁹ Other scholars agree with his assessment.⁶²⁰ Mark Julian Edwards argues that Rufinus’ translation is to be trusted even above the accusers of Origen.⁶²¹ We are confident, therefore, that Rufinus’ translation stands on its own merits, and that his translation is preferred over Jerome’s or Koetschau’s translation and is reliable.⁶²²

Origen on Transmigration: what do the Texts Say?

An investigation of the Origen passages should indicate whether he embraced transmigration or not. If the texts demonstrate that he embraced transmigration, the neo-Gnostics are correct. However, if the texts demonstrate that Origen denied transmigration, the neo-Gnostic claim that he was condemned for embracing it in 553, is false. Their claim that clerics excise reincarnation from the Bible at that time is equally false. However, determining which view is correct requires that we fully examine the passages where Origen either comments on transmigration, or discusses it in some length. We present below, each passage, in context, and at length, so that there can be no doubt that Origen rejected transmigration of souls.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

In Book 1 of *First Principles*, Origen comments on the falling away of souls and their assuming bodies:

⁶¹⁶ Origen, *On First Principles*, Ibid., 46,47.

⁶¹⁷ Elizabeth Clark, “L’Apologie de Jerome contre Rufin: Un commentaire”, *Theological Studies*, 9.1.1994.

⁶¹⁸ As cited by Clark, *ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁰ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook*, *ibid.*, 31.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶²² Hanson, *Ibid.*, 47.

All rational creatures who are incorporeal and invisible, if they become negligent, gradually sink to a lower level and take to themselves bodies suited to the regions into which they descend; that is to say, first ethereal bodies, and then aerial. And when they reach the neighborhood of the earth they are enclosed in grosser bodies, and last of all are tied to human flesh. It is a mark of extreme negligence and sloth on any soul to descend and to lose its own nature so completely as to be bound, in consequence of its vices, to the gross body of one of the irrational animals.⁶²³

Neo-Gnostics argue that this passage proves that Origen embraced transmigration. At first glance, it does appear that Origen embraces transmigration. However, while the Rufinus translation omits this discussion, fragments of Jerome appear in Koetschus' translation,⁶²⁴ making these allegations suspect. Because Rufinus' omissions attempt to protect Origen's less than perfect orthodoxy, one cannot assume that what Jerome stated about Origen and implied by Koetschau may be trusted. Additionally, as Butterworth suggests, this passage is probably an illusion to Plato's 'descent of the soul' in *Phaedrus*, and corroborated by Origen's later comments in *Contra Celsum*.⁶²⁵ Be that as it may, comparing Plato with Origen is unwarranted as transmigration in *Phaedrus* is definitive, whereas Origen's view of the soul's fall and redemption differs significantly from Plato's transmigration theory. As we discuss below, Origen's *Contra Celsum* leaves no doubt that he rejected transmigration.

Origen addresses the subject of angels in chapter 8. He argues that before the ages all minds are pure including demons, souls, and angels. However, the devil resisted God and suffered banishment from his presence. Other powers revolted and became demons, angels, or archangels. Some souls received a body on the earth. Origen comments on the consequences of their falling away:

But when they [fallen souls] had received from their former blessedness, they were endowed with bodies in consequence of the fall from their first estate which has taken place in them, and allotted to so long as the frenzy of their evil deeds is a passion and a delight.⁶²⁶

There are several reasons why this passage does not support the claim that Origen embraced transmigration. First, the context does not mention repeated incarnations, just one. Ancient and modern transmigration theories argue for the necessity of multiply migrations of the soul in order to eradicate or fulfill karmic debt. Second, Origen distinguishes between the incarnation of the soul and its so-called transmigration.⁶²⁷ Plotinus also argued that the first incarnation from an "invisible body" is not transmigration.⁶²⁸ Third, these passages do not exist in Rufinus' translation but originate with

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Butterworth, *Origen*, Ibid., 40.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ *Comjn* 6.85-86 as cited by Reimer Roukema, "Transmigration" in *Westminster Handbook*, Ibid., 206.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

Antipater of Bostra in John of Damascus and were inserted into the text by Koetschau.⁶²⁹ The passage is therefore not original to Origen and does not prove transmigration.

While Origen suggested that a host of souls exist (presumably in a preexistent state and without a body) in good standing before God, some souls, because of their inclination towards evil, are consigned a human body. Origen describes the degrading of human bodies to lower forms:

But, by some inclination towards evil these souls lose their wings and come into bodies, first of men; after the allotted span of human life they are changing into beasts; from which they sink to the level of insensate nature. Thus... the soul...because of reason is extinguished, it lives the life of an irrational animal; and finally even the gracious gift of sensation is withdrawn and it changes into the insensate life of a plant.⁶³⁰

There are several reasons why this passage does not prove transmigration. First, Origen considered preexistence theoretically, not as doctrine. Moreover, Koetschau illegitimately inserts outside sources into the translation.⁶³¹ They are not evident in Rufinus' translation. Second, Koetschau's inclusion rests solely on the comments of Jerome, Justinian, and Gregory of Nyssa; they do not derive from Origen.⁶³² While Jerome accused Origen of teaching that some souls will inhabit the bodies of beasts or lower animals,⁶³³ he later admits that while Origen investigated transmigration he did not intend to establish it as doctrine.⁶³⁴ Third, most scholars agree that Rufinus' translation of *First Principles* (1.8.4) demonstrates that Origen explicitly rejects transmigration because it is contrary to Scripture.⁶³⁵ Additionally, Origen argues elsewhere that souls never receive animal bodies.⁶³⁶ Despite Koetschau's assumptions, while Origen theorizes that beasts may have human souls; he does not consider it dogma. Ironically, Rufinus' translation agrees with Origen:

For our part, however, let these statements not be doctrines but let them be said for the sake of discussion, then discarded. The sole reason for saying them is that it may not seem that a question has been mooted without discussion. When however, this perverse has been confuted and banished in its own place and time, we shall explain in what manner the texts that they

629 *Sacra Parallela* 2.770-771 as cited by Butterworth, *ibid.*, 67.

630 *First Principles* 1.8

631 See *Fragment* 17a where he borrows from Gregory of Nyssa (*de Anima et Resurr*) and *De Hom. Opificio* c.28 as cited by Butterworth, *Ibid.*, 72.

632 *Ibid.*, footnote 8.

633 *sermone latissimo disputavit*, as cited in Butterworth, *Ibid.*, 72.

634 *Epist.* 124.4

635 Butterworth, *ibid.*, 72. See also, Roukema, *Ibid.*, 206.

636 *CommRm* 7.8. Origen's view is corroborated by Phamphilus' *Aoplogy* (PG 17.596C) where he cites Origen's work *On the Resurrection*.

produce from holy scriptures are to be interpreted.⁶³⁷

Koetschau arbitrarily inserted sources in his translation in order to fill obvious gaps in Origen's theology. Doing this created the illusion that Origen embraced transmigration. However, expressing the opinions of others as if they belong to Origen does not prove that they were his. We are convinced that Koetschau's references are merely compilations of opinions about Origen, and not necessarily attributable to Origen at all. For example, Gregory of Nyssa suggests that Origen embraced preexistence and transmigration of souls.⁶³⁸ However, the context of this statement reveals that this is Gregory of Nyssa's attitude towards Origen and not Origen's opinion.

Some scholars argue that Origen taught that if a soul associates with the irrational it descends to the "nature of the brutes" and is eventually clothed with an irrational animal.⁶³⁹ However, while the passage seems to suggest transmigration, it too, originated with Gregory of Nyssa and not with Origen.⁶⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the original Greek is lost so we depend on inferences in the Rufinus, Jerome, and Justinian's translations. However, Justinian cannot be trusted for reasons mentioned earlier and Jerome conceded that Origen's comments on transmigration are not dogma. Rufinus' attitude, on the other hand, is clear:

We think that those opinions, which some are accustomed unnecessarily to inquire into and uphold, to the effect that souls depart so far from their true selves as to forget their rational nature and dignity and to sink down into the condition of irrational animals, like beasts or cattle, ought certainly not to be accepted. In support of these opinions they are accustomed to quote certain passages out of the scriptures...For our part, we beg leave to mention these things not as fixed doctrines, but as opinions to be discussed and then rejected.⁶⁴¹

This appears to be another example of Rufinus' attempts to protect Origen. However, there is nothing in the passage that proves that Origen embraced transmigration.

Neo-Gnostics typically appeal to *First Principles* 4.1.23 as proof of transmigration. For example, C.J. Ducasse argues that this passage is one of only two in early Christianity that demonstrates transmigration.⁶⁴² Other scholars insist that Rufinus' translation proves that Origen believed that after death the soul re-enters a new body repeatedly until it reaches purification.⁶⁴³ However, Ducasse ignores the fuller context of the passage as Origen distinguishes between those who go to Abraham's bosom and those who inhabit hell. Indeed, nothing in the passage suggests the transmigration of souls. Again, the immediate and broader reading of the passage does not refer to transmigration:

637 *First Principles* 1.8.4; p. 105.11-16 as cited in Edwards, *Origen Against*, Ibid., 98.

638 Butterworth, Ibid., 72.

639 Ibid.

640 Ibid., 74.

641 Ibid.

642 C.J. Ducasse, *A Critical Examination of Belief In a Life After Death* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, Reprint, 2010), 213. Ducasse cites Plotinus as the other reference to transmigration.

643 Ibid.

Everyone, accordingly, of those who descend to the earth is, according to his deserts, or agreeably to the position which he occupied there, ordained to be born in this world, in a country, or among a different nation, or in a different mode of life, or surrounded by infirmities of a different kind or to be descended from religious parents, or parents who are not religious; so that it may sometimes happen that an Israelite descends among the Scythians and a poor Egyptian is brought down to Judea. And yet our Savior came to gather together the lost sheep of the house of Israelites did not accept his teachings, those who belong to the Gentiles were called. From which it will appear to follow, that those prophecies which are delivered to the individual nations ought to be referred to the souls, and to their different mansions.⁶⁴⁴

Ducasse not only ignores the fuller context of the passage, he cites German, Greek, and Latin sources to prove his point. He commits the logical fallacy of assuming what one is trying to prove. However, none of these sources supports his contention that Origen has transmigration of souls in mind. Indeed, Origen begins Book 4 by urging believers to stay true to scripture by adhering to legitimate methods of biblical exegesis.⁶⁴⁵ This same attitude extends throughout the book.⁶⁴⁶ For example, Origen discusses Paul's distinction between a disbelieving Jew and a spiritual Jew suggesting that a parallel reality exists where a higher invisible world contains countries corresponding to those of this world.⁶⁴⁷ Interpreting Scripture allegorically, as Origen often did, is a common practice of the day. Origen is merely suggesting that the basis of a soul's choice in the preexistent state determines position in the afterlife.⁶⁴⁸ While allusions to preexistence are detectable,⁶⁴⁹ there is no evidence of transmigration in the passage.

COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Several passages in *Commentary on the Gospel of John* seem to suggest transmigration. In chapter 2, Origen discusses the origins of John the Baptist stating that John's soul comes from a "higher region."⁶⁵⁰ He also suggests that John the Baptist may have been an angel in the preexistent state and

644 *First Principles* 4.1.23

645 *Ibid.*, 4.1.1.

646 Kannengiesser, *Handbook*, 537.

647 *Ibid.*, 4.3.9.

648 *Ibid.*

649 See for example, Marguerite Harl, *Le déchiffrement du sens: Etudes sur l'hermeneutique chretienne d'Origene a Gregoire de Nysse* (Collection des etudes augustiniennes), Institut d'etudes augustiniennes (1993), 374 where she argues that preexistence is central to Origen's theology, and Edwards, *Ibid.*, 89 where he argues that Origen "...never embraced this doctrine, either as an hypothesis or as an edifying myth."

650 *ComJn* 2.24

later became a man.⁶⁵¹ However, his concluding remarks are worth noting:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He who sent is sent from somewhere to somewhere; and the careful student will, therefore, enquire from what quarter John was sent, and whither now we adduce certain solutions which help to confirm the deeper meaning about John. In the same passage [John 1:6] it is added, he came for witness, to bear witness of the light. Now, if he came, where did he come from? When did He send him and give him this injunction? The answer to this question will probably be that when He sent him to begin to baptize, then He who dealing with him uttered this word. But a more convincing argument for the view that John was sent from another region when he entered into the body, the one object of his entry into this life being that he should bear witness of the truth, may be drawn from the narrative of his birth.⁶⁵²

Origen goes on to say:

He who sedulously guards himself in his dealings with Scripture forced, or casual, or capricious procedure, must necessarily assume that John's soul was older than his body, and subsisted by itself before it was sent on the ministry of the witness of the light. Nor must we overlook the text; this is Elijah, which is to come Matthew 11:14. For that general doctrine of the soul is to be received, namely, that it is sown at the same time with the body, but is before it, and is then, for various causes, clothed with flesh and blood; then the words sent from God will not appear to be applicable to John alone.⁶⁵³

A fair reading of the passage indicates that Origen was not referring to transmigration of souls. While he alludes to John's preexistent soul, he was not imagining Greek transmigration or re-embodiment but distinguishing between the incarnation of a soul, as a one-time event, and multiply migrations of souls in multiple bodies.

Neo-Gnostics argue that Origen's comments regarding John are a clear example of transmigration. However, in context, the passage indicates something else:

As we are now engaged with what is said of John, and are asking about his mission, I may take the opportunity to state the view which I entertain about him...No wonder if, when the firstborn of all creation was assuming a human body, some of them should have been filled with love to man and become admirers and followers of Christ, and thought it good to minister to his kindness towards man by having a body like that of men...and who would not be moved at the thought of his leaping for joy

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 2.25.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 2.24.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

when yet in the belly, surpassing as he did the common nature of man? Should the piece entitled ‘The prayer of Joseph, one of the apocryphal works current among the Hebrews, be thought worthy of credence, this dogma will be found in it clearly expressed. Those at the beginning, it is represented having some marked distinction beyond men, and being much greater than other souls, because they were angels, they have come down to human nature.’⁶⁵⁴

Origen continues:

Thus, Jacob says: I, Jacob, who speak to you, and Israel, I am an angel of God, a ruling spirit, and Abraham and Isaac were created before very work of god; and I am Jacob by men, but my name is Israel, called Israel by God, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every creature which God caused to live. And he adds: When I was coming from Mesopotamia of Syria, Uriel, the angel of God, came forth, and said, I have come down to the earth and made my dwelling among men, and I am called Jacob by name.⁶⁵⁵

Origen concludes, citing *Romans* 9:11-14:

We have made something of a digression in introducing this story about Jacob and appealing to a writing which we cannot well treat with contempt; but it certainly adds weight to our argument about John, to the effect that as Isaiah’s voice declares Isaiah 40:3 he is an angel who assumed a body for the sake of bearing witness to the light. So much about John considered as a man.⁶⁵⁶

Origen simply recalls Old Testament allusions to preexistence in order to buttress his point concerning John. However, this hardly constitutes transmigration. Moreover, while the Isaiah passage conveys the idea that angels are messengers of God, it does not prove that John is formerly an angel. Origen merely conceives a theory based on Old Testament passages coupled with Apocryphal references.⁶⁵⁷ This said, a plain reading of the passage reveals John’s true identity. Indeed, Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, corroborates John’s identity. Again, Origen’s theory as to John’s true identity, were speculative, and not considered dogma.⁶⁵⁸

Origen’s commentary on John 6: 7 is quite revealing. He addresses the birth of John the Baptist, his relationship to Elijah, and the all-important subject of trans-corporation or transmigration of souls. He

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.25.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ *Prayer of Joseph*

⁶⁵⁸ Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, John 1-10, Thomas C. Oden, Gen.ed., (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 29.

also refers to a Christian sect that is convinced that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah. However, instead of affirming their view, Origen corrects their misinterpretation of Scripture. While Origen strongly disagrees, he admits that the subject of reincarnation needs further investigation.⁶⁵⁹ This said, he lays out his reasons for rejecting reincarnation:

As for the first point, one might say that John did not deny that he was Elijah. This will be explanation of those who find in our passage a support for their doctrine of trans-corporation, as if the soul clothes itself in a fresh body and did not quite remember its former lives. These thinkers will also point out that some of the Jews assented to this doctrine when they spoke about the Saviour as if he was one of the old prophets, and had risen from the tomb but from his birth. The same person will adduce the text in Genesis; I will destroy the whole resurrection, and will thereby reduce those who give themselves to finding in Scriptures solutions of false probabilities to a great difficulty in respect of transcorporation as a false one, and does not admit that the soul of John ever was Elijah, may appeal to the above-quoted words of the angel, and point out that it is not the soul of Elijah that is spoken of as John's birth, but the spirit and power of Elijah.⁶⁶⁰

Origen continues:

Our churchman, to go on with his views, may further say that those who supposed Jesus to be one of the prophets risen from the dead were probably mislead, partly by the doctrine above mentioned, and partly by supposing Him to be one of the prophets, and that as for this misconception that he was one of the prophets, these persons probably fell into their error from not knowing about Jesus' supposed father and actual mother, and considering that He has risen from the tombs. As for the text in Genesis about the resurrection, the churchman will rejoin with a text to an opposite effect, God has raised up for me another seed in place of Abel whom Cain slew; Genesis 4: 45 showing that the resurrection occurs in Genesis. As for the first difficulty which was raised, our churchman will meet the view of the believers in transcorporation by saying that John is no doubt, in a certain sense, as he has already shown, Elijah who is to come; and that the reason why he met the enquiry of the priests and Levities with I am not, was that he divined the object they had in view in making it. For the enquiry laid before John by the priests and Levities was not intended to bring out whether the same spirit was in both, but whether John was that very Elijah who was taken up, and who now appeared according to the expectation of the Jews without being born (for the emissaries, perhaps, did know about John's birth); and to such all enquiry he naturally answered, I am not; for he who was called John was not Elijah who was taken up, and had not

⁶⁵⁹ *CommJn* 6.7

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

changed his body for his present appearance.⁶⁶¹

Regarding transcorporation:

Our first scholar, whose view of transcorporation we have seen based upon our passage, may go on with a close examination of the text... saying they assumed the doctrine of transcorporation to be true? and that it was a current doctrine of their country, and not foreign to their secret teaching. John therefore says, I am not Elijah, because he does not know about his own former life. These thinkers, accordingly, entertain an opinion, which is by no means to be despised. Our churchman, however, may return to the charge...For with respect to what is obscure, he ought to have refrained from confessing, and to have neither affirmed nor denied the proposition put before him. If the doctrine in question really was widely current, ought not John to have hesitated to pronounce up on it, least his soul had actually been in Elijah? And here our churchman will appeal to history, and will bid his antagonists ask experts of the secret doctrines of the Hebrews, if they do really entertain such a belief. For if it should appear that they do not, then the argument based on that supposition is shown to be quite baseless.⁶⁶²

Finally:

No wonder, then, if those who conceived Phinehas and Elijah to be the same person, whether they judged soundly in this or not, for that is not now the question, considered John and Jesus also to be the same. This, then, they doubted, and desired to know if John and Elijah were the same. At another time than this, the point would certainly call for a careful enquiry, and the argument would have to be well weighed as to the essence of the soul, as to the principle of her composition, and as to her entering into this body of earth. We would also have to enquire into the distributions of the life of each soul, and as to her departure from this life, and whether it is possible for her to inter into a second life in a body or not, and whether that takes place at the same period, and after the same arrangement in each case, or not; and whether she enters the same body, or a different one, and if the same, whether the subject remains the same while the qualities are changed, or if both subject and qualities remain the same, and if the soul will always make use of the same body or will change it. Along with these questions, it would also be necessary to ask what transcorporation is, and how it differs from incorporation, and if he who holds transcorporation must necessarily hold the world to be eternal. The views of these scholars must also be taken into account, who consider that, according to the Scriptures, the soul is sown along with the body, and the consequences of such a view must also be looked

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

at. In fact the subject of the soul is a wide one, and hard to be unraveled, and it has to be picked out of scattered expressions of Scripture. It requires, therefore, separate treatment. The brief consideration we have been led to give to the problem in connection with Elijah and John may now suffice; we go on to what follows in the Gospel.⁶⁶³

There is no doubt that Origen believed that John was in some sense, Elijah. However, even John admitted that he was not literally Elijah, as if he had changed his body and renamed John.⁶⁶⁴ Indeed, Origen was skeptical about the true essence of the soul and its migration into a body. He questioned whether it was possible for the soul to enter into a second life in a body at the same period and into the same body.⁶⁶⁵ Additionally, Origen questioned whether the subject and qualities of the body remained the same.⁶⁶⁶ Finally, Origen was concerned whether the soul makes use of the same body or whether it changes.⁶⁶⁷

Origen confronts the Christian sect with other concerns. For example, do they distinguish between trans-corporation and incorporation and if so, do they affirm that the world is eternal.⁶⁶⁸ If they affirm that the world is eternal, their doctrine contradicts his doctrine of *apokatastasis*, or the restoration of all things as before. In the end, Origen is convinced that Luke's account of John's birth is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy depicting John as the one preaching in the "power and spirit of Elijah," and not a reference to trans-corporation.⁶⁶⁹

Finally, Origen believed that the soul enters the embryo at conception that the soul and body come into existence at the same time.⁶⁷⁰ Origen firmly believed that the Scriptures reject the idea that John the Baptist is the re-embodiment of Elijah.

COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* contains one of the clearest references to transmigration of souls. While we possess only books 10-17 in the original Greek (covering chapters

663 Ibid.

664 Joel C. Elowsky, *Ancient Christian*, *ibid.*, 60. The author adds, "Origen has an extended discussion concerning those who think that John earlier existed as Elijah through the transmigration of souls as well as what he refers to as a Jewish tradition that Phinehas, who was rumored to be immortal because of his zeal for the Lord (Num 25:7ff.) and his longevity in the book of Judges, was the same as Elijah." See also, Edwards, *Origen Against*, *ibid.*, 99.

665 *ComJn* 6.7

666 Ibid.

667 Ibid.

668 *ComJn* 6.11

669 Ibid.

670 *ComMatt* 15.35 as cited by Henry Chadwick in *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 166.

13:36 - 22:33),⁶⁷¹ we possess a Latin translation that dates from the 6th century A.D. that includes Book 12:9 (covering chapters 16:13 - 27:66), that runs parallel with the Greek texts.⁶⁷² Books 1-9 exist in fragments in the *Catena*.⁶⁷³ These books indicate that Origen was compelled to address the subject of transmigration even though interest in the subject among early Christians was rare.⁶⁷⁴ Most Christians were already convinced that transmigration had its roots in Greek philosophy and not with Christian teaching.⁶⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Origen's philosophical and biblical concerns lead him to investigate whether it was compatible with Christian faith. As stated, his interest intensifies because he was aware of a "Christian group" seeking to incorporate reincarnation with other Christian doctrines.⁶⁷⁶ Their chief proof-text was Matthew 11:14 where Jesus stated that John the Baptist was "Elijah, who is to come;" an apparent reference to reincarnation. Accordingly, Origen examined this passage along with others that seemed to suggest that John was the reincarnation of Elijah (*CommMt* 17:10). While most biblical scholars argue that Matthew 11:14 does not support migration of souls,⁶⁷⁷ the neo-Gnostics cite it as irrefutable proof of reincarnation in the New Testament, without any corroborating support from other biblical passages.⁶⁷⁸ However, Chapter 11 is lost, so we rely on the companion text in Book 13: 17:10 for additional commentary on the subject. Unfortunately, Origen's comment's are too lengthy to present in full detail so we will summarize his main points below. Origen addresses the tradition of the scribes regarding the role of Elijah historically and then with respect to his relationship to John the Baptist. He also argues that before the advent of Christ, Elijah came to prepare the hearts and souls of men to receive him.⁶⁷⁹ Origen then addresses the disciple's question regarding John's identity:

671 Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic*, *ibid.*, 543.

672 *Ibid.* Kannengiesser notes that Erich Klostermann [along with Ernst Benz] produced the first critical edition [1933] Vol 10 of the works of Origen in the *GCS* series and that E. Fruchtel "withdrew most of these inferences with the Greek text, in Vol 12.2 of the *GCS* edition of Origen" in 1955. He goes on to say that recent scholarship has edited Books 12 and following for the *Sources Chretiennes* series.

673 *Ibid.*

674 Norbert Brox, "The Early Christian Debate on the Migration of Souls" in *Concilium* (1993/5), "Reincarnation or Resurrection?", Herman Haring and Johann-Baptist Metz, eds. (London: SCM Press), 75.

675 *Ibid.* See also, K.Hoeisel, 'Das fruhe Christentum und die Seelenwanderlung', *Jahrbuch fur Antike und Christentum* 27/28, Munster 1984/85, 24-46: 43; cf. U. Bianchi, 'Origen's Treatment of the Soul and the debate over Metempsychosis', in L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta*, Innsbruck and Vienna 1987, 270-81; H. Frohnhofen, 'Reinkarnation und fruhe Kirche', *Stimmen der Zeit* 207, 1989, 236-44, as cited by Brox, *ibid.*, 80.

676 *Ibid.*, 75.

677 Brox, "The Early Christian," *ibid.*, 77.

678 *Ibid.*

679 *CommMt* 17.10

And let these things be said by way of illustration of the passage before us. But now according to our ability let us make an investigation also into the things that are stored up in it. In this place it does not appear to me that by Elijah the soul is spoken of, lest I should fall into the dogma of trans migration, which is foreign to the church of God, and not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the Scriptures; for it is also in opposition to the saying that all things are temporal, 2 Corinthians 4:18, and that this age shall have a consummation...⁶⁸⁰

He continues:

For if, my hypothesis, in the constitution of things which has existed from the beginning unto the end of the world, the same soul can be twice in the body, for what cause should it be in it? For if because of sin it should be twice in the body, why should it not be thrice, and repeatedly in it, since punishments, in respect of this life, and of the sins committed in it, shall be rendered to it only by the method of transmigration? But if this be granted as a consequence, perhaps there will never be a time when a soul shall not undergo transmigration: for always because of its former sins, will it dwell in the body; and so there will be no place for the corruption of the world, at which the heaven and the earth shall pass away. And if it be granted, on this hypothesis, that one who is absolutely sinless shall not come into the body by birth, after what length of time do you suppose that a soul shall be found absolutely pure and needing no transmigration? But nevertheless, also, if any one soul is always thus being removed from the definite number of souls and returns no longer to the body, sometime after infinite ages, as it were, birth shall cease; the world being reduced to some one or two or a few more, after the perfecting of whom the world shall perish, the supply of souls coming into the body having failed. But this is not agreeable to the Scripture; for it is known of a multitude of sinners at the time of the destruction of the world.⁶⁸¹

Origen concludes:

But to those who are then in existence there shall be the exaction of a penalty for their sins, but not by way of transmigration; for, if they are caught while still sinning, either they will be punished after this by a different form of punishment- and according to this either there will be two general forms of punishment, the one by way of transmigration, and the other outside of a body of this kind, and let them declare the causes and differences of these- or they will not be punished, as if

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

those who were left at the consummation of things had immediately cast away their sins; or, which is better, there is one form of punishment for those who have sinned in the body, namely that they should suffer, outside of it, that is, outside the constitution of this life, what is according to the desert of their sins. But to one who has insight into the nature of things it is clear that each of these things is fitted to overturn the doctrine of transmigration. But if, of necessity, the Greeks who introduce the doctrine of transmigration, laying down things in harmony with it, do not acknowledge that the world is coming to corruption; it is fitting that when they have looked the Scriptures straight in the face which plainly declare the world will perish, they should either disbelieve them, or invent a series of arguments in regard to the interpretation of the things concerning the consummation; which even if they wish they will not be able to do. And this besides we will say to those who may have hardihood to aver that the world will not perish, that, if the world does not perish but is to exist for infinite periods of time, if there will be no God knowing all things before they come into being. From this, it follows that there cannot be prophecies about all things whatsoever, since all things are infinite.⁶⁸²

These passages clearly demonstrate that Origen rejected the notion that John the Baptist embodied the soul of Elijah. Indeed, Origen examined transmigration not because he adopted it, but because he was aware of a Christian sect affirming it. Moreover, as Origen suggests, if transmigration is implied in the passage, why did Zachariah name his son John instead of Elijah, as the Scriptures state. Indeed, the passage does not state that the soul of Elijah migrates to John, but that the “spirit and power of Elijah” is apparent in John’s life and ministry. Origen therefore distinguishes between soul and spirit, and argues that John is not called Elijah because of the soul, but because of the “spirit and the power.”⁶⁸³

AGAINST CELSUS (Contra Celsum)

Around 246 A.D., Ambrose, a friend and admirer of Origen, requested that he respond to a treatise written by Celsus (a staunch critic of Christianity), entitled *The True word or On the True Doctrine*. The work was published some seventy years earlier (c. 178) and directed against the Christians. Its influence compelled Ambrose to seek a reasoned response from Origen. At first, Origen choose to ignore Celsus hoping that his writings would lose public interest and die out.⁶⁸⁴ However, Ambrose finally convinced him that ignoring Celsus would allow the attacks against Christianity to go unanswered. Origen agreed and wrote his greatest apologetic treatise entitled, *Against Celsus*. While *On True Doctrine* is lost, Origen’s response to it preserved most of it. That is, *Against Celsus* essentially reconstructs Celsus’ arguments leveled against the Christians.⁶⁸⁵ While scholars debate

682 Ibid.

683 Ibid.

684 McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook*, *ibid.*, 32.

685 R. Joseph Hoffmann, trans., *Celsus On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians* (New York/Oxford:

Celsus' true identity, most place him in the second century somewhere around c.185.⁶⁸⁶ According to Origen, Celsus had been dead for some time calling him an "inconsistent Epicurean determined to defeat the dogmas of the opposition."⁶⁸⁷ Indeed, Origen's response to him is an example of opposite mindsets engaged in the kind of disputations that occurred between skeptics and educated Christians of the day.⁶⁸⁸ Additionally, because Celsus challenged the religious values of both the Jewish and Christian scriptures, Origen's reply gives insight into his approach to scriptural interpretation.⁶⁸⁹ Celsus considered Christianity barbaric and superstitious for abandoning and corrupting ancient traditions in the religions of the world.⁶⁹⁰ Indeed, Celsus' entire treatise questions both the radical monotheism and exclusive ideas of the Jews and Christians.⁶⁹¹ His intentions were clearly to undermine basic Christian doctrine and to elevate Greek philosophy over Christianity. Most importantly, his comments regarding the transmigration of souls were intended to ridicule the Christian doctrine of resurrection.

AGAINST CELSUS 1.13

Celsus refers to transmigration in his caricature of the Christian attitude toward living in a predominately pagan society.⁶⁹² However, Origen accuses Celsus of taking Paul out of context:

The apostle does not say simply, Wisdom is foolishness with God, but the 'wisdom of this world'. And again, he does not just say simply, 'If any one among you seems to be wise, let him become foolish', but 'let him become foolish in this world, that he may become wise.' Accordingly, we give the name 'wisdom of this world' to all philosophy that holds wrong opinions, which according to the scriptures, is being brought to naught. We do not call foolishness a good thing without qualification, but only when anyone becomes foolish to this world. It is as if we were to say that Platonism, in believing in the immortality of the soul, and what it said about reincarnation, accepted foolishness because of the Stoics ridicule belief in these doctrines, and because the Peripatetic's talk of the Platonic ideas as 'twitterings,' and because the

Oxford University Press, 1987), 29. We are aware of criticisms leveled at this translation (see for example, "Celsus, Origen and Hoffmann" by Joseph w. Trigg, at: <<http://www.tertullian.org/rpearce/celsus/celsus.html>> 11/5/2005), and so we will cite primary source material from Henry Chadwick, trans., *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1953). Both Hoffmann and Chadwick rely on Koetschau's edition (GCS 1-8), *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* 2-3 (Berlin, 1899), which itself is derived from a thirteenth century MSS (Vatic. Gr. 386) and contains the complete work, as well as the more recent revision of Hoffman's translation (March 31, 1980).

686 Ibid., 30.

687 Ibid., 31.

688 Chadwick, *ibid.*, *Intro.*, ix.

689 Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic*, *ibid.*, 548.

690 *CCels* 1.2

691 Hoffman, *ibid.*, 34,35.

692 *CCels* 1.13

Epicureans accuse superstitious people who introduce providence and set a God over the universe.⁶⁹³

Origen accuses Celsus of embracing a systems of philosophy that circumvent the true wisdom of God as revealed in the Scriptures. As a consequence, he and those systems of philosophy, will ultimately fail. Additionally, accusing Christians unfairly and out of context, is the same as accepting the Stoic rejection of the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation. The same may be said regarding the Epicurean rejection of a providential God. Origen argues that before Celsus falsely accuses Christian's, he needs to examine the context in which they affirm or deny a belief. That is, Christian's accept doctrines that are in agreement with the scriptures, based on reason and wisdom, and not on faith alone.⁶⁹⁴

Clearly, this passage indicates that Origen regards reincarnation as a Platonist doctrine and not a Christian belief. Had he affirmed it, he would not have distinguished their belief from his own. Again, he points to the Stoic rejection of immortality of the soul and its reincarnation. The passage therefore, does not prove that Origen embraced transmigration.

AGAINST CELSUS 1.20

Transmigration is mentioned again in Book 1, Chapter 20. However, we must examine its context before arriving at any conclusions. In Book 1, 12, Origen discusses Celsus' opinion regarding the source of Christian doctrine. Origen criticizes Celsus for boasting that he has mastered Christian belief while at the same time he demonstrates ignorance of even basic Christian teaching. That is, Celsus repeatedly demonstrates his ignorance of the prophets, the parables in the Gospels, the law, the history of the Jews, and the teachings of the Apostles.⁶⁹⁵

Celsus' asserts that an affinity exists between nations that hold the same doctrines and yet he fails to include the Jews.⁶⁹⁶ Moreover, Celsus views Mosaic history figuratively while idolizing Greek poets and philosophers preoccupied with stories of the gods indulging in sexual immorality, emasculation, and other indignities. Rather, Origen argues that the heinous acts of the gods of Greek mythology do not compare to Moses' account of God.⁶⁹⁷ Moreover, even those unfamiliar with Jewish culture know that he taught about God and that the laws come from the Creator. Origen sees Celsus' attitude toward Moses as a direct attack upon Old Testament cosmogony and therefore, an affront to the Christian faith.⁶⁹⁸

Celsus' attitude leads Origen to comment on the subject of transmigration. Origen impugns Celsus' fixation on the Egyptian speculations about animals that goes beyond even normal transmigration assertions:

⁶⁹³ As cited in *Origen: Contra Celsus*, Chadwick, *ibid.*, 15,16.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁵ *CCels* 1.12

⁶⁹⁶ *CCels* 1.14

⁶⁹⁷ *CCels* 1.17

⁶⁹⁸ *CCels* 1.19

...traces of those whose wisdom exist in the irrational animals which they [the Egyptians] worship and in interpretations which show that this sort of worship of god is reasonable and rather recondite and mysterious. If, to make their doctrine about the animal's respectable the Egyptians introduce theological interpretations, they are wise; but if a man who has accepted the Jewish law and law-giver refers everything to the only God, the Creator of the Universe, he is regarded by Celsus and people like him as inferior to one who brings God down to the level not only of rational and mortal beings but even to that of irrational animals. This is even worse than the myth of transmigration, that the soul falls from vaults of heaven and descends as far as irrational animals, not merely the tame but even those which are very wild.⁶⁹⁹

Origen concludes:

And if the Egyptians relate this mythology, they are believed to be concealing philosophy in obscurities and mysteries; but if Moses wrote for a whole nation and left them histories and laws, his words are considered to be *empty myths not even capable of being interpreted allegorically* [emphasis Origen's]. For so Celsus and the Epicureans think.⁷⁰⁰

Origen argues that Celsus embraces Egyptian myths that promote the worship of irrational animals even over the Greek doctrine of transmigration, which at least has some sense of rationality. Moreover, unlike the perpetual flood accounts and conflagrations of the Egyptians, Celsus rejects the writings of Moses which are historically based realities. Simply put, Origen's comments regarding transmigration illustrate the absurdity of Celsus' argument for rejecting the writings of Moses, it is not an endorsement of it.

In Book 1, Chapter 26, Origen charges Celsus of fabricating the Jew's rejection of Jesus even though they gave no credence to the prophecies about him. While Celsus' knowledge of the Jews should have lead him to the real reasons for their rejection of Christ, the facts essentially refute his claims regarding the Jewish account of Jesus' life and character. For example, Celsus' view that Jesus is the offspring of a Roman soldier named Panthera and the Virgin Mary rests on the presupposition that denies the miraculous conception of Jesus.⁷⁰¹ Origen argued that denigrating the birth of Jesus was an invention by those denying the facts. Moreover, reason dictates that a man accomplishing the things that Jesus did, necessarily has a miraculous birth and not an illegitimate and disgraceful one, as Celsus and the Jews suggested. Origen presses his point:

Would He who sends souls down into human bodies compel a man to undergo a birth more shameful than any, and not even have brought him into human life by legitimate marriage, when he was to do such great deeds and to teach so many people and to convert many from the flood of evil? Or is it more reasonable (and I say this now following Pythagoras, Plato,

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ *CCels* 1.32

and Empedocles, whom Celsus often mentions) that there are certain secret principles by which each soul that enters a body sows so in accordance with its merits and former character? It is therefore probable that this soul, which lived a more useful life on earth than many men (to avoid appearing to beg the question by saying ‘all’ men), needed body which was not only distinguished among human bodies, but was also superior to all others.⁷⁰²

Origen argues further that it makes no sense that God assigns Jesus a shameful body, in an illegitimate marriage despite his great deeds. Rather, agreeing with the Greeks, a soul inhabits a body because of merit and character. While Origen prefers the opinion of the Greeks, he distinguishes their view from his. In other words, while they are logically correct, he rejects the transmigration aspect of their argument. Again, Origen is merely suggesting that the Greeks, whom he disagrees with on the doctrine of transmigration, are more reasonable than Celsus and the Jews.

Contrary to Celsus, Origen argues that the body of Jesus was miraculous and guaranteed that his soul remained uncontaminated by sin. Otherwise, a body resulting from adultery produces virtues contrary to righteousness. Therefore, says Origen, “...the prophets are correct: the offspring of a virgin gives birth to a child, whose name is significant of his work, demonstrating that, at his birth, God is with men.”⁷⁰³

Clearly, an examination of these passages indicate that Origen did not embrace transmigration of souls.

AGAINST CELSUS 3.75

Celsus continues his attack upon Christian clerics arguing that they are like unqualified physicians promising others health, but preventing them from consulting with expert physicians. Origen accuses Celsus of doing the same thing that he accuses the Christian’s of doing. Namely, the very physicians that he consults (the Stoics) engage in polytheistic worship, deny divine providence, and indulge in worldly pleasure.⁷⁰⁴ The so-called physicians to whom Celsus trusts, dispense disease through their own doctrines. Origen asserts, however, that Christian’s are the real physicians because they offer the cure and deliverance from the wounds of the soul. Moreover, why prevent Christian’s from rescuing others mislead by the doctrines of the Stoic’s who distort God’s true nature. Indeed, contrary to the Stoics, Christian’s lead the sick to a loving Creator.⁷⁰⁵ Most importantly, Christian’s cure those suffering harm because of transmigration:

It may be true, also, that we cure those who have suffered harm caused by the foolish doctrine of re-incarnation, taught by the physicians who degrade the rational nature sometimes to an entirely irrational animal, sometimes even to that which is incapable of perception. Do we not train those who believe in the Gospel to be better in their souls? Christian doctrine does not teach that unconsciousness or loss of reason will

⁷⁰² *CCels* 1.33 as cited in Chadwick, *Origen*, *ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁴ *CCels* 3.75

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

be inflicted on a bad man as a punishment, but shows that troubles and punishments are applied by God to bad men as medicines to convert them. This is the view of intelligent Christians, though they accommodate themselves to the more simpleminded in the way that fathers do with very young children.⁷⁰⁶

Celsus' concept of transmigration differs from the Christian idea that God allows humans to suffer bad things in order that they turn to Him. Origen concludes therefore, that transmigration is harmful and degrading to the body and soul.

AGAINST CELSUS 4.14

Origen is particularly disturbed by Celsus' attack on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Celsus suggests that the Christian God cannot possibly undergo such a radical change and retain the same nature. Origen asserts that Celsus simply misunderstands the nature of God's descent to human affairs. That is, the descent of God in Christ does not mean that his nature changed in a moral or divine sense; God's nature or essence remains unchanged because it is not subject to change. While complex, Origen argues that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is more comprehensible than the Epicurean and Stoic conception of God:

But the gods of Epicurus, who are compounded of atoms and, in so far as they are compounded, are liable to dissolution, are at pains to throw off the atoms which may cause their destruction. Furthermore, the god of the Stoics, in that He is corporeal, at one time when the conflagration occurs consists entirely of mind, while at another time, when the new world comes, he becomes a part of it. Not even they have been able to perceive clearly the true conception of god's nature, as being entirely incorruptible, simple, uncompounded, and indivisible.⁷⁰⁷

Origen exposes Celsus' contempt for the Incarnation by arguing that he fails to grasp the true nature of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures. Moreover, Origen argues that Celsus' real problem with the Incarnation stems from his religious bias:

If he [Celsus] had understood what is appropriate for a soul which, will have everlasting life, and what is the right view of its essence and origin, he would not have ridiculed in this way the idea of an immortal person entering a mortal body; our view here does not accept the Platonic doctrine of the transmigration of souls, but a different and more sublime view). He would also have understood how because of His great love to man, God made one special descent in order to convert those whom divine scripture mystically calls 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' which had strayed down from the mountains; in certain parables the

706 As in Chadwick, *ibid.*, 179. Chadwick adds: "Plato held that human souls could become re-incarnate in animals; metempsychosis into plants, though not stated by Plato himself, was held by later Platonists such as Plotinus" (See footnote).

707 *CCels* 4.14 as cited in Chadwick, *ibid.*, 192,193.

Sheppard is said to have come down to them, leaving on the mountains those which had not gone astray.⁷⁰⁸

Origen clearly distinguishes his attitude from those who embrace transmigration as a means of assuming a mortal body.

AGAINST CELSUS 4.83

This passage addresses Celsus' lengthy critique of the Christian view of divine providence. Celsus argues that God made everything for humankind and irrational animals equally, whereas, Christians believe that God made all things for man alone and not for the animals.⁷⁰⁹ Origen argues however, that this same attitude must also apply to the Stoic philosophers who hold essentially the same view. Indeed, most philosophers agree that it is providence that makes all things because of rational beings.⁷¹⁰ Origen surmises that Celsus' basic error is that he fails to distinguish between the reasonable actions of humans and the irrationality of animals whose behavior stems from nature.⁷¹¹

Moreover, Origen argues that Celsus' attitude leads to a metaphysical absurdity because if there is no distinction between rational and irrational behavior, every soul is the same shape:

Perhaps, however, Celsus means to hint that every soul is of the same shape (for in many points he likes to follow Plato), and that the soul of man is no different from the ants and bees. This view of him who brings the soul down from the vaults of heaven not only to the human body but even to other bodies also. Christians will not believe these doctrines, for they have already been told that the human soul was made in the image of God entirely to abandon its characteristics and to assume others, I know not what, which, are made after the image of some sort of irrational beings.⁷¹²

Origen rejects Celsus' view of divine providence because it depends on transmigration. Rather, Christians maintain that the human soul is created in God's image and therefore incapable of losing its divine image. Moreover, it will never assume the characteristics of lesser irrational beings, as taught in transmigration theory.

AGAINST CELSUS 5.29

This passage addresses Celsus' attitude towards Jewish laws and customs in relationship to other nations. Celsus argues that unnamed authorities govern the Jews just as other nations are governed.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁷⁰⁹ *CCels* 4.75

⁷¹⁰ *CCels* 4.81

⁷¹¹ Ibid., 4.83.

⁷¹² As cited in Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, *ibid.*, 250. See footnote 4: "According to Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246b-247B, in the process of transmigration a fallen soul may enter an animal."

Origen argues that Celsus' view creates more problems than it solves. That is, the so-called unnamed authorities may refer Zeus, Zen, Adonai, Amoun, or some other god. The Jews, on the other hand, possess land by the will of a sovereign God apart from any divine commissioner.

Origen believed that an earth divided between authorities and governed by overseers creates a whole range of moral and ethical problems. For example, one nation may favor incest while others wish to prohibit it. Moreover, one nation may allow child sacrifice for purification while others may choose to forbid it. Origen therefore questions Celsus' accusation against the Jews for being impious for breaking ancestral laws that are immoral and unjust. Additionally, why are the Jews guilty of wrongdoing because they worship one God while others worship a crocodile or calf or regard the goat as a god. Moreover, argues Origen, Celsus condones the behavior of things that are not divine by nature because of some unnamed authority whereas, the prophet Moses gives the true account of how and why the nations become what they are:

We have much of a mysterious nature to say about this, to which the quotation [*Wisdom of Solomon* 10.5] is appropriate that 'It is good to hide the mystery of a king.' For we so not want the truth about the way in which souls became bound to a body (though not by reincarnation) to be cast before an uneducated audience, nor that holy things should be given to dogs, nor that pearls be cast before swine. For that would be impious, as it implies a betrayal of the secret oracles of the wisdom of God, of which it is finely written: 'wisdom will not enter into a soul that devises evil, nor dwell in a body that is held in pledge by sin.' It is enough to give an account of the doctrines which are obscurely set forth under the guise of a story by following the course of it, in order that those who have the ability may work out the meaning of the passage for themselves.⁷¹³

Origen's point is that in the midst of confusion, when the nations are divided, God determines the time and place of David's birth (*Deut.* 32:8, 9). That is, God determines the time and place of a soul and body, on the basis of divine providence, irrespective of transmigration.⁷¹⁴ Indeed, Origen believed that one should investigate the passage in the context of an historical narrative.

AGAINST CELSUS 5.49

This passage reiterates Origen's criticisms of Celsus' attitude toward authorities presiding over the nations. Origen argues that names pertaining to God are not arbitrary conventions of men because they possess inherent meaning and significance.⁷¹⁵ If this is true with respect to human names, how much more with respect to those names applied to God. Moses and the prophets understood this as they prohibited the people from addressing other gods while invoking the only supreme God. Moreover, the gods of other nations are not identical to the Jewish and Christian God because they do not share a divine nature. Indeed, the God that Origen worships is the supreme God, called by Jews and

⁷¹³ *CCels* 5.29 as cited in Chadwick, *ibid.*, 287.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁵ *CCels* 5.45

Christian's by a title unlike all others.⁷¹⁶ Origen believed that the Greek gods were far from divine and the invocation of the Egyptian god, Ammon, was tantamount to invoking demons.⁷¹⁷

Origen next addresses Celsus' view of the Jewish doctrine of circumcision as it relates to Jesus. He argues that at one time the angel [Satan] had power or authority over the uncircumcised and against those worshipping the Creator.⁷¹⁸ His authority continued until Jesus assumed a body that experienced literal and spiritual circumcision (referring to his death), thus, rendering the devil powerless over the followers of Christ.⁷¹⁹ However, his disciples misunderstand the significance of circumcision before the advent of Jesus. Origen corrects Celsus, explaining why the Jews abstain from eating pork and clarifying the Jewish-Christian attitude toward the Gentile brethren:

Therefore, it is nothing to do with either the Jews or us that the Egyptian priests abstain not only from pigs but *in addition from goats, sheep, oxen, and fish* {emphasis, Origen's). But since 'it is not that which goes into the mouth that defiles a man.' And since 'meat does not commend us to God' we are not proud because we do not eat; nor do we come to meals with gluttonous motives. So then, for all we care, let the Pythagoreans continue as they like in abstaining from living things. But notice also the difference in the reason for the abstention from living things between Pythagoreans and the ascetics among us. For they abstain from living things on account of the myth about the soul's reincarnation...But if we are abstain, we do this because we bruise the body and bring it into subjection and want to 'mortify our members that are on earth, fornication, impurity, licentiousness, passion, evil desire'; and we do everything in our power to mortify the deeds of the body.⁷²⁰

Origen concludes that nations do not share the same beliefs even if their rituals are similar. Indeed, the Jewish rite of circumcision was unique because it represented atonement for sin, an obvious precursor to the Christian doctrine of atonement. Unlike the Pythagorean's who abstained from eating living things because of transmigration, Christian's abstain from certain practices in order to subdue sinful deeds done through the body.⁷²¹ What matters for Origen is the mortification of the body in this life, in order to prepare it for the next life with God; a transition that does not depend on transmigration and a doctrine that Origen considered mythological.

AGAINST CELSUS 6.36

In book 6, Celsus makes a series of disparaging remarks against the Christian view of the kingdom

716 *CCels* 5.46

717 *Ibid.*

718 *CCels* 5.48

719 *Ibid.*

720 *CCels* 5.49, as cited in Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, *ibid.*, 303. Chadwick adds, "Belief in metempsychosis into animals (so Pythagoras and Empedocles) meant that if a man killed an animal for food he might be killing a relative."

721 *Ibid.*

of God while at the same time, elevating the writings of Plato. Celsus maintained that the Christian idea of God misunderstood Plato and went beyond even the Jewish concept of heaven. Moreover, the Jewish and Christian concepts of heaven compare with the mysteries of the Persian Mithra's. However, Origen argued that it was impossible for the Jewish prophets to have borrowed from Plato as they preceded him. Moreover, the Christian view of heaven derived first from David and then from the teachings of Jesus and the disciples.⁷²² Origen explains it this way:

However, let Celsus and the readers of his book realize that seven heavens are nowhere mentioned in the scriptures which we believe to be genuine and divine. Nor is it because they borrowed from the Persians or the Cabeiri that our prophets, or the apostles of Jesus, or the son of God himself, say certain things.⁷²³

Celsus continues his attack on Christian doctrine, arguing that the Christian notion of the soul is no different from the Gnostic conception of the soul. However, Origen distinguishes their concept from his maintaining that the soul that is saved, is a living soul.⁷²⁴

Another concern for Origen is Celsus' statement that death in the world ceases when the sin of the world dies.⁷²⁵ Origen argued that Celsus misunderstood the context of Paul's statement, "And when he has put all his enemies under his feet, then, death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed;"⁷²⁶ and, "When this corruptible body puts on incorruptibly, then the word that is written shall come to pass, death is swallowed up in victory."⁷²⁷ Origen accused Celsus and others of distorting Paul in order to prove reincarnation:

But it is perhaps those who hold the doctrine of reincarnation who would speak of a narrow descent again.⁷²⁸

A plain reading of this passage indicates that Origen distinguished between those affirming transmigration, and those who don't. If Origen favored reincarnation, why did he distinguish between his view and those who believe in this doctrine. Perhaps it is because Origen had no intention of confusing Christian belief with those who embraced transmigration of souls.

AGAINST CELSUS 7.32

Book 7 begins with Celsus' attack on the Christian view of God. Celsus argues that Christian's

⁷²² *CCels* 6.23

⁷²³ Ibid. As cited in Chadwick, *Contra*, 337.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ *CCels* 6.36

⁷²⁶ 1 Corinthians 15: 25,26

⁷²⁷ 1 Corinthians 15: 54

⁷²⁸ *CCels* 6.36, as cited in Chadwick, *ibid.*, *Contra*, 351,352.

worship a God that has a material body just like humans.⁷²⁹ Origen corrects Celsus, stating that Bible teaches that God is incorporeal, while those viewing God anthropomorphically, are mistaken.⁷³⁰ Celsus accuses Christian's of borrowing their view of the afterlife from Plato.⁷³¹ However, Origen reminds the reader that Moses preceded Plato and therefore taught a different concept of heaven. Moreover, the idea that Moses borrowed from Plato makes no sense because the prophets are earlier than the Greeks. Therefore, the Greek perception of a better place derives from an understanding of the biblical texts, and not from Greek mythology. Indeed, Origen believed that the Greeks may have purposely modified the texts to agree with their own philosophy.⁷³²

Celsus' attack on the Christian doctrine of resurrection is scathing. Origen admits that Celsus' errors derive from his misunderstanding of the fundamental biblical concept of resurrection and because he borrows from others just as ignorant as he is:

It is worth adding to our remarks on the subject this one observation about the doctrine. We do not talk about the resurrection, as Celsus imagines because we have *misunderstood the doctrine of reincarnation* but because we know that when the soul, which in its own nature is incorporeal and invisible, is in any material place, it requires a body suited to the nature of that environment.⁷³³

Additionally:

In the first place, it bears this body after it has put off the former body which is necessary at first but which is now superfluous in its second state. In the second place, it puts a body on top of that which it possessed formerly, because it needs a better garment for the purer, ethereal, and heavenly regions. When it came to be born into this world, it put off the afterbirth, which was useful for its formation in the womb of the mother so long as it was within; and underneath that it put on what was necessary for the one that was about to live on earth.⁷³⁴

Origen understands the basic differences between the resurrection body and reincarnation. While the soul requires a material body in the present life, the future resurrection body is in many ways identical to the former one yet suited for life in heaven. Unlike reincarnation, which assumes multiple

⁷²⁹ *CCels* 7.27

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7:30.

⁷³¹ *CCels* 7.28

⁷³² *CCels* 7.30

⁷³³ As cited in Chadwick, *Contra*, *ibid.*, 420.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.* Chadwick adds several comments from Origen's *de Resurrectione* I,22, 4-5: "For it is necessary for the soul that is existing in corporeal places to use bodies appropriate to those places. Just as if we became aquatic beings, and had to live in the sea, it would no doubt be necessary for us to adopt a different state similar to that of the fish, so if we are to inherit the kingdom of heaven and to exist in superior places, it is essential for us to use spiritual bodies. This does not mean that the form of the earlier body disappears, though it may change to a more glorious condition."

migrations of the soul into different bodies, the resurrection requires only one body, a heavenly tabernacle not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, possessing spiritual qualities.⁷³⁵ The hope of the Christian does not hinge on multiple migrations, or endless acquisitions of bodies as required by reincarnation theory.⁷³⁶

AGAINST CELSUS 8.30

In Chapter 8, Origen examines Celsus' remarks regarding the Jewish and Christian practice of abstaining from certain foods. Origen accuses Celsus of distorting Jewish and Christian customs while he fails to abstain from all animals (a practice that even the Pythagorean's observe). Celsus suggests that Christians either fully observe Jewish customs that includes refraining from eating meats offered to idols, or violate the very customs they wish to observe. In other words, Christian's cannot have it both ways.

Origen's response is twofold: Christian's do not follow the strict Jewish customs of sacrifice nor do they abstain from eating all animals.⁷³⁷ In fact, Christian's generally disagree with Jewish rituals based purely on Moses' teachings. Moreover, laws pertaining to the eating or abstaining of certain meats must not hinder pure worship of God.⁷³⁸ Origen believed that if abstinence is practiced, it is not because Christian's follow certain customs, but because they believe in abstaining from evil.⁷³⁹ That is, Christian's always seek to avoid things associated with evil. Moreover, eating food with gluttonous motives without consideration for the health of the body and its restoration is harmful.⁷⁴⁰

Finally, Origen argues that even if Christian's abstained from eating flesh, their motives differed from the Pythagorean's:

However, even if we do sometimes abstain from animals, it is certainly not for any reason similar to that of Pythagoras that we do not eat their flesh. For we do not hold the doctrine of transmigration of the soul and its fall even to irrational animals. We acknowledge honour to the rational soul only, and commit its organs to the grave with honour according to the customary ceremonies. For the dwelling of the rational soul does not deserve to be cast aside without honour and in a casual manner like that of irrational animals.⁷⁴¹

A thorough reading of the Origen texts leads to only one conclusion: none of these passages demonstrate that Origen embraced transmigration of souls. In every instance where Origen mentions

⁷³⁵ *CCels* 7.32

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁷ *CCels* 8.28

⁷³⁸ *CCels* 8.30

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴¹ *CCels* 8.30 as cited in Chadwick., *Contra*, *ibid.*, 473, 474.

transmigration, he repudiates it, states that it is incompatible with Christian belief, or disavows it. Throughout the course of his life and in his public lectures, Origen had every opportunity to present a case for “Christian reincarnationism.” Yet, he argues repeatedly that transmigration of souls is incompatible with Christian belief.

These passages along with a broader reading of Origen do not support transmigration. Origen consistently maintained that transmigration was a dogma unknown to the church, not taught by the Apostles, and found nowhere in the Scriptures. Moreover, transmigration directly contradicts the biblical teaching that there is a consummation and renewal of all things. That is, if transmigration were true, there would be no end, sin would continue, and souls would migrate to other bodies forever. Moreover, who can say precisely when a soul experiences purity; and, if a soul becomes pure and no longer needs bodies, why do the Scriptures emphasize that at the time of the end, and the destruction of the world, there are still sinners. Indeed, Origen believed that sinners were accountable for their own sins, according to the deeds committed in the body, in this one life, and not because of multiple lives. Transmigration, however, presupposes guilt from an earlier period - before one’s natural birth. Origen therefore rejected transmigration because it required a purging in the present life.⁷⁴²

Origen considered transmigration as a grand attempt to escape scriptural truths concerning the consummation of the age. That is, while the Greeks maintained that the world continues for infinite periods with no finality, no end, and no consummation, Origen believed that God knows things before they come into being, and that it is not possible if there is no finality to those things known by him. Prophetic fulfillment therefore makes no sense!⁷⁴³

Despite Origen’s rejection of transmigration, neo-Gnostics routinely cite these same texts in order to prove that he embraced it. However, when they cite them, they edit them, quote them out of context, or borrow from other sources to prove that Origen embraced reincarnation. For these reasons, we reject the neo-Gnostic case for “Christian reincarnationism”.

CHAPTER 5

⁷⁴² Brox, *The Early Christian*, *ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁴³ *CommMt* 13.2

ORIGEN'S NOTION OF SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

Origen rejected the Greek and Gnostic transmigration theories of the afterlife. He also rejected the recurrent world's theory held by the Stoics which guaranteed future cycles of salvation. Rather, Origen's eschatology marks a beginning and an end that culminates in the *apokatastasis*, a time when all of creation returns to God. Indeed, Origen's doctrine of creation and time refutes the idea that a world exists without a beginning. Moreover, his view of the resurrection and divine judgment point to a biblical-driven eschatology.

Despite this, neo-Gnostics maintain that he incorporates transmigration ideas with his Christian faith. However, Origen's eschatological scheme, his doctrine of salvation, and his notion of the afterlife, preclude the doctrine of reincarnation. As we have illustrated, the bulk of Origen's thinking rejects the transmigration of souls. Moreover, Origen advanced a linear rather than a cyclical view of history and a Theo-centric (God centered) rather than an anthropocentric (human-centered) soteriology. While Origen maintained that fallen souls participate in the salvation process, apart from the divine pedagogy, salvation is not attainable. However, salvation, according to reincarnation theory, can only be achieved by the purging of one's own karmic debt.⁷⁴⁴ Indeed, had Origen subscribed to these doctrines, he would have incorporated them in his theological framework. However, his writings indicate that he rejected these ideas.

When confronted with the facts, Neo-Gnostics will argue that Origen's doctrine of resurrection is a 'form' of reincarnation.⁷⁴⁵ However, there is no evidence that he considered these terms to mean the same thing. As we have demonstrated, Origen rejected transmigration because it was incompatible with Christian belief. While his use of Greek terminology evokes harsh criticism, to his credit, he rejected the Greek and Gnostic doctrines of karma and reincarnation. Moreover, nowhere in his writings does he suggest that resurrection is a form of reincarnation. Throughout his life and ministry, he carefully examined all teachings in light of the Scriptures and the Rule of Faith.⁷⁴⁶ This said, in order to demonstrate that Origen rejected transmigration, we will examine the Greek and Gnostic notions of salvation and the afterlife and then contrast them with his.

Greek Notions of the Afterlife

Before Plato, the Greek concept of the soul connoted both a 'psyche' (a kind of 'free-soul'), and a kind of 'body soul' (physical organs such as the lungs and the heart).⁷⁴⁷ Accordingly, the psyche aspect animates the body controlling it in the same way that the wind 'controls the earth.'⁷⁴⁸ Upon death, the soul dissipates similar to breath exiting the body. The Greeks envisioned the soul's descent into the

⁷⁴⁴ Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation in Christianity: A New Vision of the Role of Rebirth in Christian Thought* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 114.

⁷⁴⁵ Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982), ix.

⁷⁴⁶ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, the Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*, Vol.2 (Utrecht Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1950), 40.

⁷⁴⁷ Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

underworld, a subterranean kind of existence. However, Pythagoreanism, introduced to the Greeks, the doctrine of reincarnation, the importance of the soul's return, and the notion of 'celestial immortality' over the subterranean afterlife.⁷⁴⁹ While Pythagorean ideas influenced Plato, not all Greeks shared the same attitude regarding the soul. For example, Plato subscribed to a tripartite theory of the soul while the Epicurean and Stoic conceptions of the soul differed from his. Aristotle considered the soul to be an impersonal 'life principle' rather than an entity.⁷⁵⁰ He also believed that the soul was essentially the form of the body and does not survive the death of an individual entity.⁷⁵¹

Platonism generally held that humans are composite beings consisting of a corporeal element (a body) and a soul (an incorporeal element that is divine) which is imprisoned in the body.⁷⁵² Accordingly, man's true nature is divine and not the physical.⁷⁵³ However, Origen believed that the goal of a fallen soul was not to recall its original divinity, but to acknowledge that God created it in his own image and is therefore a reflection of him. Whatever divine elements the soul possesses, it is due to the goodness and foresight of the Creator. Platonism, on the other hand, held that the 'self' achieves salvation through knowledge. Plato believed that salvation is essentially a return to 'authentic existence,' a state of being that is lost through a fall.⁷⁵⁴ Plato also believed in periodic reincarnation or transmigration in order to reach this goal.⁷⁵⁵ That is, the soul may experience multiple incarnations until it is finally free from karmic debt and delivered.⁷⁵⁶ Accordingly, while the soul is immortal and comes from God, it is capable of returning to the Creator after its purification.⁷⁵⁷ While Plato emphasized the end, the process or the means to the end is more important. While Origen also emphasized the process or education of the soul, he was more concerned about the end, as he envisioned in the doctrine of *apokatastasis*.

Again, some Greeks did not assume that the soul was immortal, believing rather, that it does not exist independent of the body. The Epicureans, for example, believed that the soul, like all nature, consisted of physical atoms that eventually die along with the body.⁷⁵⁸ Moreover, because the soul

749 Ibid.

750 Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy and H. Newton Malony, eds., *Whatever happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 3.

751 John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 13.

752 See "Immortality," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & The Free Press, 1967), 139.

753 Edward Moore, 'Salvation and the Human Ideal: Plato, Plotinus, Origen' <<http://newplatonism.homestead.com/files/salvatio.html>> Copyright 2000 Accessed July 16, 2009.

754 Ibid., 'Introduction,' no page number.

755 C.J. Ducasse, *A Critical Examination of the Belief in Life after Death* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1961), 211-213.

756 Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 2, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 186, 187. See by the same author, *Death, Afterlife, and Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 57-59.

757 Gaius Glenn Atkins and Charles Samuel Braden, *Procession of the Gods* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1948), 278.

dissolves, man had nothing to fear- including the gods who exercised influence over them.⁷⁵⁹ Indeed, the materialistic worldview of Epicureanism, rules out the need to redeem both body and soul. Stoicism held that rational principles divinely governed, lead men to live virtuous lives that results in happiness.⁷⁶⁰ Moreover, as with Aristotle and Heraclitus, reason or fire (*logos*) is a divine spark, residing in each human being.⁷⁶¹ Accordingly, after one dies, the spark returns to the world soul or divine spirit. However, like Epicureanism, there is no salvation of the soul or body in Stoicism, as they are essentially pantheistic. That is, the soul, being an emanation of God, is absorbed into the seminal reasoning of the universe. The body is important only to the extent that it serves as a container for virtues that affect the mind.⁷⁶²

As indicated, Epicurean and Stoic philosophy envisions no salvation for the body or the soul. Their notion of salvation means returning to a state of purity or perfection. That is, when the soul fully pays its karmic debt, it is absorbed into the Divine Soul. Herein lays the central difference between Origen's view of the afterlife and theirs: in Greek thought, souls are eternal and depend on an infinite succession of bodies.⁷⁶³ Only after their release from the wheel of reincarnation are they perfect and no longer dependent on other bodies. Origen, on the other hand, believed that God redeems both body and soul, emphasizing the spiritual and material aspects of salvation in the present life and in the afterlife.

The Gnostic Notion of Salvation

As noted, the literary evidence on Gnosticism, indicates that it was thoroughly syncretistic. That is, Gnostic schools combined elements of mysticism, Greek philosophy, Judaism, with the Christian ideas of salvation.⁷⁶⁴ By the time of Origen, a number of Gnostic's schools flourished in Alexandria, Egypt. While some are distinct from others, they share core ideas. For example, they all believed that a radical dualism existed between God -a supreme monadic divinity- and matter, man, and the world. They all believed that a Demiurge or creator god was an emanation of the Supreme God and was responsible for the imperfect material world. They also believed that man's true nature was spiritual or divine and though captive in a body, was advancing towards salvation through *gnosis* or knowledge. Finally, all Gnostic's believed that both the material world and the human body, is associated with evil.

While all of these ideas influenced Gnostic eschatology to some degree, their concept of dualism determined their notion of salvation.⁷⁶⁵ That is, while they affirmed that God was transcendent, and

⁷⁵⁸ Daniel Kolak, *Lovers of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy with Integrated Readings* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001), 112.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁶¹ Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 423.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 424.

⁷⁶³ Ninian Smart, 'Reincarnation,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & The Free Press, Reprint, 1972), 123.

⁷⁶⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 448.

⁷⁶⁵ 'Gnosticism' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, 340.

unknowable by worldly means, the material visible world (matter) was associated with evil and stood in opposition to God and the ideal world.⁷⁶⁶ The goal of Gnosticism, therefore, was release from the bondage of the material world because of ignorance, through revelation knowledge or *gnosis*. Redemption, meant salvation not from sin in the biblical sense, but from ignorance. Moreover, salvation was not attainable through Christ's vicarious death, but on the basis of his life and teachings. Therefore, when a person dies, death releases the 'divine spark' from its imprisonment in the body. If the divine spark dominated one's life one re-unites with the *Pleroma*.⁷⁶⁷ However, achieving perfection anticipated a great deal of time.⁷⁶⁸ That is, if the material or carnal instincts dominated one's life,⁷⁶⁹ reincarnation was inevitable; hence, re-imprisonment in another body. While most Gnostic's suggest that multiple numbers of incarnations are necessary to achieve salvation,⁷⁷⁰ some do not associate reincarnation with salvation.

Origen's Notion of Salvation

Origen maintained that in the beginning, God created rational creatures that eventually fell, 'cooled down,' and became souls.⁷⁷¹ These souls fell in different degrees and received bodies that corresponded to the gravity of their fall.⁷⁷² Origen believed that some souls received celestial bodies such as stars or planets, while others became angels or demons, or received human bodies.⁷⁷³

While many scholars in Alexandria conceptualized humans as tripartite beings (body, soul, and spirit),⁷⁷⁴ Origen, preferred Paul's distinction between flesh and spirit.⁷⁷⁵ More importantly, he rejected both the Platonic and Gnostic concepts of the soul, as well as the Stoic notion that the soul was essentially a body. Origen believed rather, that souls or created spirits, have a body of 'tenuous substance' because God alone is incorporeal.⁷⁷⁶

Origen maintained that the soul chooses to gravitate towards God or to regress from him. Moreover,

⁷⁶⁶ Schaff, 454.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., 456.

⁷⁶⁸ See for example, the *Tripartite Tractate* 122.25- 124.3. As cited by Brian E. Daley in *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 27.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 456.

⁷⁷⁰ Bremmer, *The Rise*, 60.

⁷⁷¹ *PArch* 2.8.3

⁷⁷² See 'Souls' in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, John Anthony McGuckin, ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 201.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 88.

⁷⁷⁵ *PArch* 3.4.2-5

⁷⁷⁶ Edwards, 111; *PArch* 1.1.3-4

the soul was both the source of sin and capable of sinning.⁷⁷⁷ The body, however, becomes sinful when the soul loses focus on the Creator and becomes involved in carnal passions.⁷⁷⁸ Accordingly, the body serves God's redemptive purpose, because it is an 'unfinished reality.'⁷⁷⁹ Indeed, Origen argues that the body will undergo a transformation or final spiritualization.⁷⁸⁰ How and when this takes place is described in his doctrines of *apokatastasis* and resurrection.

Apokatastasis

Some scholars argue that parallels exist between Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* and the structural metaphysics of Plotinus.⁷⁸¹ While this is true with respect to the education of the soul, there are clear distinctions between their view and his. For example, they disagree over the length of the educational process- Plotinus argues that it takes repeated births,⁷⁸² while Origen believed that it takes only one lifetime.⁷⁸³ Moreover, Origen's notion of universal salvation is categorically different from Plotinus' idea of the primordial unity of all Being. Plotinus' view corresponds, rather, to the quasi-panteism of Evagrius who spoke of the 'mingling' of all rational beings with the Creator.⁷⁸⁴ However, the assimilation of human nature with the Divine contradicts Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis*, as the restoration of all things (a unity and harmony of creation), is not an absorption of the Creator with the created.⁷⁸⁵ Indeed, Origen argues repeatedly that there exists original distinctions between God and created spirits.⁷⁸⁶

Universal salvation also contradicts Origen's assertion that some creatures are beyond saving. Contrary to Jerome,⁷⁸⁷ Rufinus,⁷⁸⁸ and MacGregor,⁷⁸⁹ he did not believe in the salvation of the devil and

⁷⁷⁷ McGuckin, 54.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ *PArch* 4.4.8

⁷⁸⁰ *PArch* 2.2.4

⁷⁸¹ Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 115.

⁷⁸² See Plotinus' *The Decent of the Soul* as cited in C.J. Ducasse, *A Critical*, 212, 213.

⁷⁸³ Bronx, 79.

⁷⁸⁴ Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Melania the Elder and the Origenist Controversy: the Status of the Body in a Late-Ancient Debate' in *Nova & Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton*, John Petruccione, ed., (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 1998), 127.

⁷⁸⁵ *Hom in Jer* 14.18

⁷⁸⁶ J.N.D. Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 486.

⁷⁸⁷ *Apol adv Ruf* 2.1.8

⁷⁸⁸ *De Adult Libr Orig* [PG 17.624-625]

⁷⁸⁹ Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation in Christianity: A New Vision of the Role of Rebirth in Christian Thought* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1981), 163.

other evil spirits.⁷⁹⁰ Indeed, their views are based on their misconceptions of Origen.⁷⁹¹ While Origen admits that his theory of final restoration is speculative, and not doctrine,⁷⁹² he developed it as a result of his struggles with the issues of death, salvation, and immortality.⁷⁹³ He even cited apocalyptic passages in the Bible to support his conjecture.⁷⁹⁴

Origen believed that salvation (or restoration) was not merely a cosmological process or an abstract idea; it was initiated by God and is a direct result of his loving, saving, action in the cross and resurrection of Christ. Indeed, the focus of his theology is the eventual salvation of the cosmos. Origen believed that salvation is both individually and collectively possible and that it is a present and future reality realized in the restoration of all things back to the Creator.⁷⁹⁵ Moreover, the time preceding the end designates the soul's progression toward perfection until the consummation,⁷⁹⁶ at which time the Parousia, judgment, and resurrection occur.⁷⁹⁷

Origen also interpreted the *Parousia* (Christ's return) in both literal and metaphorical terms.⁷⁹⁸ It was literal in that there was a real second coming of Christ; it was metaphorical in that Christ is always present. Therefore, believers will not die in the ultimate sense.⁷⁹⁹ However, Origen choose to emphasizes its soteriological significance over its strict literalism.

Second-century Christian works indicate that the term *apokatastasis* generally means the 'attainment' or 'realization' of a goal.⁸⁰⁰ While a similar idea already existed in the philosophical system of the Stoics, Origen uses the term because he knew that his audience understood its meaning.⁸⁰¹ Moreover, Origen based his view on Paul's doctrine of finality, a Day of Judgment, and resurrection.⁸⁰² This said, Origen's interpretation of Paul raises important questions regarding the doctrine of restoration.⁸⁰³ For example, did Origen mean that restoration was incorporeal, pantheistic, or universal

790 See his *Letter to Friends in Alexandria*, [PG 17: 6.24-25].

791 Crouzel, 235.

792 *PArch* I.6.3; *ComJn* 28..8

793 See for example, *SerMt* 32-60; *ComMt* 17.29; *PArch* 3.6.6.9; and, *DialHer* 24f.

794 See *PArch* 3.5.7, where Origen interprets 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 as proof for this doctrine.

795 Celia E.Rabinowitz, "Personal and Cosmic Salvation in Origen." *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, no. 4 (Dec. 1984): 319-329.

796 Ibid., 320.

797 Ibid.

798 John T. Carroll, *The Return of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 163.

799 Ibid., 165.

800 Daley, 58.

801 *Jo* I.16.91 as cited by Daley, *ibid.*

802 Joel 2:32; Ezekiel 13:5; Isaiah 2:12; Matthew 24: 27; Acts 10:42; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; Revelation 20:4

803 Crouzel, 258.

in scope.⁸⁰⁴ It would appear that he meant a state of corporeality, in that God alone possess incorporeality.⁸⁰⁵ Moreover, the assertion that the corruptible body will rise incorruptibly implies some sense of corporeality.⁸⁰⁶ Again, Origen did not equate restoration with pantheism as he opposed the Stoic doctrine of re-absorption of all creatures into God. Moreover, Origen argued that an incorporeal being ‘cannot be subject to a conflagration,’ nor is the dissolution of the soul possible.⁸⁰⁷ Finally, Origen did not mean that final restoration included the devil and other evil spirits. Indeed, there is no conclusive evidence that he held the radical form associated with his name.⁸⁰⁸

Apokatastasis did not originate with Origen as other Christians utilized the term before he did. For example, Clement of Alexandria used it before Origen and probably influenced his use of the term.⁸⁰⁹ Gregory of Nyssa also uses the term.⁸¹⁰ However, neither of these individuals were criticized for using the same terminology. Indeed, Christians reject not the doctrine itself, but the Platonist distortion of it.⁸¹¹ Moreover, whatever Origen meant by *apokatastasis*, it precluded references to *metempsychosis* or reincarnation.

Resurrection

The Platonist and Gnostic contempt for the body stems from their belief that the material universe is associated with evil. Accordingly, they either devalued the material body, or denied its reality. Origen, on the other hand, believed that because the body houses the soul, it has intrinsic value. Agreeing with Paul, he believed that the body was a temple of God possessing dignity and respect.⁸¹² Origen also believed that because the body houses the soul, it has a unique identity and would experience a resurrection or radical transformation, from corruption to incorruptibly.⁸¹³ Indeed, he discussed the body/soul relationship in two treatises and two dialogues.⁸¹⁴ However, as with preexistence and *apokatastasis*, Origen’s view of the nature of the resurrection body was harshly criticized.

The debate over the nature of the resurrection body began long before Origen and has continued to

804 Ibid.

805 *PArch* 1.1.1-4; 3.6.1ff

806 *PArch* Praef.5

807 *CCels* 7.71

808 John R. Sachs, ‘Apokatastasis in Patristic Theology,’ *Theological Studies* 54, no. 4 (Dec. 1993): 617-640.

809 Ibid., 618.

810 McGuckin, 59.

811 Ibid., 288.

812 John Patrick, *The Apology of Origen in Reply to Celsus: A Chapter in the History of Apologetics*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), 165.

813 *PArch* Praef.5

814 Crouzel, 279.

the subject of scholarly debate.⁸¹⁵ While Origen's conception of the resurrection body differs from normal Christian teaching, our primary concern is with respect to Origen's view of the afterlife as contrasted with the reincarnation view of the afterlife.⁸¹⁶ However, because Origen's critics accused him of degrading or denying the resurrection, we will briefly examine his doctrine.⁸¹⁷

That Origen believed in the resurrection of the body is unquestionable. His view, while disagreeing with apostolic tradition, largely follows Paul.⁸¹⁸ That is, like Paul he interpreted the resurrection as a relationship between human existence and the afterlife, where bodily existence was the 'norm.'⁸¹⁹ Indeed, Origen believed that human existence was tied inextricably to a body.⁸²⁰ He reasoned that if God rewarded the soul for enduring pain and suffering in this life, he would also reward the body for enduring the same thing. In other words, the justice of God guarantees the resurrection of the body.⁸²¹ Anaxagoras, Irenaeus, and others held similar views. They argued that in order for justice to prevail, it was necessary that both the body and soul be present for reward and punishment.⁸²²

As stated, Origen's view on the nature of the resurrection body was controversial because he believed in the spiritualization of matter and questioned the physicality of the resurrection body. For these reasons, many of his contemporaries harshly criticized him. For example, Justinian accused Origen of teaching that men rise spherically implying that bodies do not rise.⁸²³ Methodius of Olympus argued that Origen's view of the risen body was essentially a spiritual form devoid of matter.⁸²⁴ Similarly, Epiphanius implied that Origen denied any 'genuine bodily resurrection.'⁸²⁵ Additionally,

815 See for example, Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: Epworth Press, 1958); Lynn Elvin Boliek, *The Resurrection of the Flesh: A Study of a Confessional Phrase* (Amsterdam: Drukkerij En Uitgeverij Jacob Van Campen, 1962); John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul*, 78-81; Murray J. Harris, *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990); Trenton Merricks, 'The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting' in *Reason for the Hope Within*, Michael J. Murray, ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 261-286; *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker, eds., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002); and, Kirk R. MacGregor, '1 Corinthians 15:3b-6a, 7 and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus,' in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, no. 49/2 (June 2006): 225-34.

816 For a thorough analysis of the subject, see J.A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body: a Study of the Biblical Data* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964).

817 Jon F. Dechow, 'The Heresy Charges Against Origen' *Origeniana Quarta* 4 (1985): 112-122.

818 1 Corinthians 15

819 Joel B. Green, 'Bodies- that is, Human lives: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible' in *Whatever happened*, 172.

820 Ibid.

821 Boliek, 42.

822 Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Boston/Leiden: Brill Publishers, Inc., 2004), 152,153.

823 PG 86/ 1,973

824 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.71.14.

Jerome asserted that Origen assumed that in the end all matter would cease to exist.⁸²⁶ However, even if these charges were valid, they have more to do with Origen's understanding or interpretation of the *nature* of the resurrection body, than with the denial of the doctrine itself. Moreover, these criticisms are suspect as the texts upon which these criticisms originate, no longer exist.⁸²⁷ Despite this, they continued to be sources of on-going criticisms.⁸²⁸

That Origen interpreted the resurrection body differently from the orthodox, is undeniable. However, it bears repeating, when discussing Origen's heterodoxy one should have several things in mind: first, criticism leveled at Origen should be towards his interpretation of the *nature* of the resurrection body, not because he denied it; second, all too often, scholars rely on sources biased towards him; third, while Methodius claimed that Origen rejected the material identity of the resurrection body, he failed to consider other teaching where Origen affirmed it.⁸²⁹ Some modern authors make the same mistake.⁸³⁰ Fourthly, while Origen suggested that the total spiritualization of matter was 'hypothetically tenable,' he admitted that he was uncertain whether it constitutes the final bodily form.⁸³¹ Moreover, he envisioned the resurrection state as being of such 'refined materiality' that bodily corruption and change would no longer be possible.⁸³² Indeed, this does not suggest that he denied the materiality of the resurrection body. Rather, it is an admission that the body undergoes such radical transformation that its essential qualities change.⁸³³ Origen merely argues that a transformation is necessary in order for the soul to enjoy life in the presence of God.⁸³⁴ This is why he describes the resurrection body as being '...spiritual, finer, more ethereal quality than the earthy body...' ⁸³⁵ Rather than denying the doctrine of resurrection, Origen sought a mediating position between the extreme literalism of the orthodox and the radical dualism of the Gnostic's, that affirms a resurrection body possessing dominating spiritual properties.⁸³⁶ Unlike the Gnostic's, Origen's notion of salvation

825 Ibid., 64.63-64, as cited by Brian E. Daley, 'A Hope for Worms: Early Christian Hope' in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, Ted Peters, Robert John Russell, and Michael Welker, eds., (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 152.

826 *Epist.* 92.2

827 According to Eusebius, Origen wrote two books on the resurrection (*H.E.* 6.24.2). He also wrote two dialogues on the subject (*CCels* 6.20 and *PArch* 2.10.1.). Fragments of these survive in Pamphilus (*Apol.pro Origene* 1.7), Methodius of Olympus (*De resurr.*) and Jerome (*Contra Joh Hier* 25-26).

828 Crouzel, 249.

829 Ibid., 245.

830 Ibid, 235.

831 McGuckin, 185.

832 *PArch* 2.3.7

833 Daley, *A Hope*, 156.

834 Ibid.

835 Antonia Tripolitis, *Origen: A Critical Reading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 33-34.

836 J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Revised Edition, (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 471.

envisions the transformation of a material, physical body.

Concerns for Origen stems not from a denial of the resurrection, but with respect to the *nature* of the resurrection body. Indeed, he urges Christians to consider the nature of the resurrection in order to understand what body will undergo punishment or rewards.⁸³⁷ The questions, therefore, center on the composition of the resurrection body. In other words, Origen was concerned about what body will rise and whether there was continuity between resurrection bodies with the former body. He was not satisfied with the traditional view or the Gnostic position so he challenged them on scientific and theological grounds. He therefore argues from science, that the body is in a constant state of change due to basic biological functions (i.e. food is eaten, absorbed by the body, and then turns to tissue).⁸³⁸ That is, when the body dies it returns to its constituent elements, and while the composing elements do not cease to exist, they cannot be put together again in their original form.⁸³⁹

Origen believed that the resurrection makes no sense unless it refers to individual bodies existing in some recognizable form.⁸⁴⁰ His argument against Celsus' ridicule of the resurrection, affirms a reconstituted material body (as the orthodox), related causally to the present one, yet wholly different from the former.⁸⁴¹ While Origen agrees with Celsus' ridicule of the orthodox, he defended the resurrection using Platonist terminology.⁸⁴² Moreover, Origen compares the Stoic concept of the seminal principle or seed⁸⁴³ with Paul, describing the resurrection of the body as the growth of a grain of wheat, sown in the ground.⁸⁴⁴ This seed or principle provides the continuity between the physical and the spiritual body thus supporting his notion that the resurrection body that rises (though its materiality is different) is strictly identical with the body bore on earth.⁸⁴⁵ Origen was convinced that some form of the present body is recognizable in the future resurrection body.⁸⁴⁶

Despite his departure from orthodoxy, Origen's view of the resurrection body provides insight into the problems he encountered while trying to explain a concept that few Christians at that time understood. However, as unorthodox as he may have been, his conception of the resurrection body had no relationship to the migration of the soul into multiple bodies required for salvation in reincarnation

837 *PArch* 2.10.1. As cited in Quasten, 65.

838 Henry Chadwick, 'Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body' *The Harvard Theological Review* 41(1948): 83-102.

839 *Ibid.*, 88.

840 *PArch* 2.10.1-2

841 *CCels* 5.18-23

842 Patrick, 10.

843 Henry Chadwick, 'Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa' *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 48 (1947): 39-47.

844 *1 Corinthians* 15:34-38. Here Paul states, 'But God gives it a body as it has pleases him, and to every seed his own body'.

845 Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: the Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 114.

846 Brian E. Daley, 'Resurrection' in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, John Anthony McGuckin, ed., (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 184.

theory. That is, he envisioned a future resurrection of the dead (a transformation of the flesh) that was categorically different from bodies manufactured for housing lost souls.

No early Church council or Christian creed mentions reincarnation. However, both the Council of Lyons (A.D. 1274) and the Council of Florence (A.D. 1439) declare that after death, the soul goes to heaven or hell to await the Day of Judgment, and will stand before Christ with their bodies to account for what they have done.⁸⁴⁷ Implicit in these pronouncements is the assumption that the soul does not transmigrate from one body to another.

While neo-Gnostics maintain that previous incarnations explain pain and suffering, Origen's notion of salvation precludes any such notion. Origen believed that pain and suffering corresponds to the degree one responds to the divine pedagogy in the present life. Moreover, to suggest that an infinite series of rebirths is necessary to educate the soul is contrary to Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis*, where the end will be as the beginning.⁸⁴⁸ While purification is necessary for all sinners, Origen's doctrine of the end-time precludes the possibility of the soul repeating life.⁸⁴⁹ That is, every soul accepts its responsibility before God in a single body in this one life.⁸⁵⁰

As stated, while Origen's doctrine of resurrection differs from the orthodox, he affirms it, nonetheless. Moreover, it precludes *metempsychosis*,⁸⁵¹ as he posits a belief in the final resurrection, the eschatological fulfillment for all Christians.⁸⁵²

Judgment & Hell

Origen struggled with the concept of divine judgment and while he searched the Scriptures for answers, he also appealed to reason as, he was convinced that the subject was not yet settled.⁸⁵³ Even then, he admits that his views on the subject were speculative rather than definitive.⁸⁵⁴ It is not surprising that his views regarding the nature and duration of punishment after death, are some of the

847 Catholic dogma refers to this as the doctrine of 'Particular Judgment.' The doctrine is also in the profession of faith of Michael Palaeologus in 1274, in the Bull 'Benedictus Deus' of Benedict XII, in 1336, and in the professions of faith of Gregory XIII and Benedict XIV". John McHugh, 'Particular Judgment' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). See New Advent: < <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08550a.html>> Accessed April 16, 2008.

848 *PArch* 1.6.2; 3.6.1.3

849 Norbert Brox, 'The Early Christian Debate on the Migration of Souls' in *Concilium*, 1993/5, Herman Häring and Johann-Baptist Metz, eds., (Maryknoll, NY: SCM Press Ltd and Orbis Books, 1993), 79.

850 Ibid.

851 *CCels* 7.32: 'We do not talk about the resurrection, as Celsus imagines, because we have *misunderstood the doctrine of reincarnation*, but because we know that when the soul, which in its own nature is incorporeal and invisible, is in any material place, it requires a body suited to the nature of that environment.' See Henry Chadwick, trans., *Origen: Contra Celsum* (London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1953), 420.

852 Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 55.

853 Ibid., 112.

854 Jason M. Scarborough, 'Hades' in *The Westminster*, 119.

more controversial aspects of Origen's eschatology.⁸⁵⁵ While he believed in the universality of redemption (with the exception of the Devil and other fallen angels), he considered hell both a punishment for sinners and a means of rehabilitation.⁸⁵⁶ That is, hell is 'purgatorial fire' that awaits unregenerate souls after death.⁸⁵⁷ While these fires are figurative and not literal, as his contemporaries espouse, its purpose was remedial rather than vengeful and temporary rather than eternal.⁸⁵⁸ Moreover, the intersection of human free will and divine grace affects the degree of punishment. Origen believed that in this state, free will and divine grace work together in the education process. Contrary to the Gnostic denial of freedom and grace, the Epicurean emphasis on chance, and the determinism of the Stoics, Origen defended the notion that all rational creatures were free to love God or neglect him.⁸⁵⁹ The duration and degree of punishment therefore, depends on the progress of the soul – primarily its response to the divine pedagogy. Accordingly, the 'intermediate state' serves to educate the soul as it prepares for the 'eternal vision of God.'⁸⁶⁰

The concept of purification or 'purgatory' did not originate with Origen. Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and others developed similar ideas.⁸⁶¹ In its basic form, Eastern Christians considered it to be an educational process while Western Christians emphasized its retributive quality.⁸⁶² While neo-Gnostics describe reincarnation as 'purgatory',⁸⁶³ the traditional view of Purgatory differs significantly from their view. For example, it does not imply an indefinite state nor does it constitute a 'second chance' salvation.⁸⁶⁴ Moreover, whether Purgatory is a place or a condition of temporal punishment as in Roman Catholicism today,⁸⁶⁵ it does not constitute purification in the reincarnation sense. Ironically, even though neo-Gnostics acknowledge these differences, they still insist that karma and reincarnation are compatible with Christian belief!⁸⁶⁶

855 Ibid.

856 *PArch* 2.8; *CCels* 6.15.25

857 *PArch* 2.10.4.5 as cited by Scarborough, 118.

858 Ibid., 119.

859 Joseph S. O'Leary, 'Grace' in the *Westminster Handbook*, 115.

860 *PArch* 3.6.9

861 John R. Sachs, 'Resurrection or Reincarnation? The Christian doctrine of Purgatory' in *Reincarnation or Resurrection?* Hermann Häring and Johann-Baptist Metz, eds., (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 82.

862 Ibid.

863 Ibid., 99-108.

864 Ibid., 83.

865 Erickson, 1183-1186; See also, Zachary J. Hayes' 'The Purgatorial View' in *Four Views on Hell*, William Crockett, Gen., Ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 89-118; and, Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 686, 687. For a strictly Roman Catholic overview, see Joseph Pohle, Eschatology; or, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1917), as cited in Erickson.

866 MacGregor, 75.

Origen's interpretation of the term *Hades* also differs from others.⁸⁶⁷ He intentionally countered the notion that God was an arbiter of pain and suffering.⁸⁶⁸ Rather, the purification of sinners is based on God's mercy and grace.⁸⁶⁹ Moreover, Origen believed that because no soul was without sin, it could not stand in the presence of God's holiness.⁸⁷⁰ Indeed, purging was a necessary precondition that prepares one for the divine encounter.

Origen was convinced that divine wrath did not originate from God's passion or emotion. That is, God does not punish on the basis of feelings. Contrary to the Gnostic assertion that God is cruel and unjust, Origen argued that the 'intrinsic consequence of sin' brought on divine judgment, making humans responsible for their own actions.⁸⁷¹ Accordingly, the degree that each soul responds to the divine pedagogy, determined the type and duration of punishment after death.

Origen also struggled with the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment. Indeed, he described hell in psychological or moral terms.⁸⁷² The idea that hell was a fire that burns eternally, ran counter to Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* where everything in creation returns to its original place.⁸⁷³ Additionally, Origen believed that the word eternal connotes duration without end or a long period as in an 'age' or 'aeon.'⁸⁷⁴ He therefore distinguished between the punishment of human souls for a time and the punishment of the devil and his angels, as continual.⁸⁷⁵

Despite his concerns regarding hell and the duration of punishment, Origen affirmed the survival of souls after death and their immediate punishment. Indeed, he believed that a future, final judgment awaited all souls. Moreover, Origen's doctrines of *apokatastasis*, and resurrection, both attest to the coming redemption of fallen human souls. While Origen was not able to reconcile divine punishment with divine grace, his view of hell and punishment still stand in sharp contrast with the Greek and Gnostic notions of the afterlife.

867 Scarborough, 119.

868 *CCels* 5.15

869 John R.Sachs, 'Apokatastasis in Patristic Theology,' *Theological Studies*, 54:4 (Dec. 1993), 617-640.

870 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Penguin Putman, Inc., 1990), 105.

871 Sachs, 626.

872 Daley, 56.

873 Sachs, 626.

874 Ibid.

875 *Hom in Lev* 3-4; cf. *Comm Ser in Matt* 72 as cited in Daley, 56, 57..

CHAPTER 6

ORIGEN, TRANSMIGRATION AND THE FIFTH GENERAL COUNCIL

Proponents of new age or Eastern-based religion allege that reincarnation was a Christian doctrine until its excision from the Bible in the sixth century.⁸⁷⁶ If this were true, it would explain why it is absent from the Bible and in mainstream Christianity today. However, besides the biblical and theological objections to reincarnation, there are philosophical and historical reasons why their claim is false. That is, Christians reject reincarnation because its religious or philosophical underpinnings contradict basic biblical teaching. Had reincarnation been compatible with Apostolic teaching in early Christianity, it would have been present in the Rule of Faith,⁸⁷⁷ and in the New Testament. However, there is no evidence that reincarnation is present in either of these sources. Nor is there evidence that ecclesiastics arbitrarily excised reincarnation from the Bible in the sixth century. Despite this, neo-Gnostics attempt to revise church history in order to assimilate reincarnation with modern Christianity. However, we will demonstrate in our study that attempts to revise church history for theological gain, runs counters to objective scholarly research.

While it would seem logical to begin our analysis of reincarnation at the time of its alleged excision from the Bible, we must begin at a much earlier date. For, unless we understand the mindset of the early Christians during the first few centuries and their development of Christian teaching, we cannot reasonably refute the claims of the neo-Gnostics. Additionally, the decisions of the major ecumenical councils prior to the Fifth General Council play a major role in early Christianity. While an exhaustive analysis of this period would require volumes,⁸⁷⁸ we are forced to present a brief overview of the events leading up to the Fifth General Council, highlight the details of its proceedings, and then comment on its decisions. Let us therefore proceed with an overview of the early centuries of Christianity after Christ and the Apostles.

Early Christian Thinking

The earliest Christians were either Jewish or Gentile proselytes (pagans converted to Judaism) and strict monotheists. That is, they believed in the existence of only one God. For Jews and Christians, the unity of God as revealed in the Old Testament, was a fundamental 'article of revealed religion that opposed all forms of idolatry.'⁸⁷⁹ Converting to Christianity did not change the basic Jewish confession of faith (the *Schema*): 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. 6:4).⁸⁸⁰ Neither did converted Jews cease from observing Jewish practices such as daily Temple attendance, fasting,

⁸⁷⁶ See for example, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *Reincarnation: the Missing Link in Christianity* (Corwin Springs, MT: Summit University Press, 1977), 192-223; Steven Rosen, *The Reincarnation Controversy* (Badger, CA: Torchlight Publishing, Inc., 1977), 69-86; Joe Fisher, *The Case for Reincarnation* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985); and, Herbert Bruce Puryear, *Why Jesus Taught Reincarnation* (Scottsdale, AZ: New Paradigm Press, 1992), 38.

⁸⁷⁷ As we have mentioned, the Rule of Faith was a body of beliefs accepted by early Christians. Origen believed that it embodied the Christian faith as handed down by the Apostles (PArch, 3.1.1). See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press/Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 43.

⁸⁷⁸ For an introduction to historical theology see, Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001).

⁸⁷⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 566.

reverence for Torah, Jewish holy days, and liturgical worship along side other distinctly Christian ordinances. While many Gentile converts practiced these things, their biggest concern was trying to understand God in personal terms rather than an abstraction as conceptualized in Greek thinking.⁸⁸¹ Accordingly, their conversion to Christ eventually led them to an understanding and acceptance of the personal attributes of God.⁸⁸²

While the early Christians affirmed that the God of the Old Testament was the Savior of humanity, they also believed that Jesus was their Savior.⁸⁸³ The New Testament writers make this abundantly clear,⁸⁸⁴ when they refer to Jesus as the object of their worship,⁸⁸⁵ and ascribe to him, the identity of Yahweh.⁸⁸⁶ It is no surprise therefore, that by the late second century, Christians were convinced that Jesus was both human and divine.⁸⁸⁷ However, their view of Christ created a philosophical dilemma. however, if there was only one God, how can they intellectually consider Christ divine or equal to God and remain thoroughly monotheistic. This created the illusion that there were two gods, not one. Furthermore, while the Hebrew term for God (*Elohim*) depicted the unity of the one true God, it also referred numerically, to the gods of the heathen.⁸⁸⁸ It appeared that Christians affirming Jesus' deity had to choose between a false god or one that shares God's nature. However, the early Christians believed that God revealed himself in human or angelic form (a *theophany*).⁸⁸⁹ Yet, permanent residencies of God in human form (incarnation) was to them, a foreign concept.⁸⁹⁰ That is, the incarnation of Christ suggested 'an opposition to all theories of a theophany or transitory appearance of God in human form.'⁸⁹¹ However, Paul stated emphatically, that in Jesus '...dwells all the fullness of Deity in bodily form.'⁸⁹² He solves the dilemma by reminding his fellow Christians that while there are false gods, and false lords, there is only one true God and one true Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

880 John 17:3; Eph. 4:4, 6 See also, Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 445.

881 Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 48.

882 Ibid.

883 Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: the Basics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 61.

884 Acts 4:12; Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11; Hebrews 2: 10

885 Matthew 8:2; 14:33; John 9:38; 1 Corinthians 1:2

886 Bauckham, as cited by Craig L. Blomberg in his review of Richard Bauckham's, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, *The Denver Journal* 2, no.,1999, no page number.

887 Kelly, 138; Placher, 69. See also Blomberg, Ibid.

888 C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament*, Vol.1, trans., James Martin (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint, 1971), 73.

889 Genesis 17:1-4; 18: 1-33; 22: 11-15; 32: 24-30; Joshua 5: 13-15; Daniel 3: 22-25

890 From the Latin , *incarnatio* (*in: caro*, flesh) corresponds to the Greek *sarkosis*, or *ensarkosis*, which words depend on John. See <<http://www.newadvent.org/bible/joh001.htm>> "\\l "vrs14> *kai ho Logos sarx egeneto...*' See Walter Drum, 'The Incarnation' *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 7, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07706b.htm>> Retrieved, May 2007.

891 Ibid., 684.

That is, by placing Jesus firmly in the middle of this confession, Paul attests to the unity that Christ shares with God.⁸⁹³ Accordingly, Paul accentuates both the identity and significance of Jesus for early believers.

Besides Paul, several New Testament writers identify Jesus as both God and Man. For example, the Synoptic writers ascribe to Jesus such titles as Son of God (Luke 10:22; Matt. 3:17), Son of Man (Matt. 9:6; Mark 10:45), and Lord (Acts 10:36; 7:59-60). Paul again speaks of Jesus as the Son of God (Rom. 1:4; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13) and Lord (1 Cor. 11:23; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:9). John argues that Jesus is the Word (the *Logos*), God in human flesh (1:1, 14; 10:30). Additionally, several New Testament authors ascribe attributes associated with the God of the Old Testament equally to both the Son and the Holy Spirit. For example, the Son and Holy Spirit possess the following attributes: eternal (John 1:2; Hebrews 9:14; Rev. 1:8,17), power (Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Peter 1:5), omniscience (1 Cor. 2:11; Rev. 2:23), omnipresence (Matt. 18:20), holiness (Acts 1:8; 3:14; Rev. 15:4), truth (John 7:28; 1 John 5; Rev. 3:7), and, benevolence (Rom. 2:4; Eph. 5:25).

In early Christianity, new converts were baptized using a Trinitarian formula (Matthew 28:17-20), suggesting that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share mutual authority. John's teaching on the Spirit seems to present an early Trinitarianism as well.⁸⁹⁴ Additionally, several New Testament authors either implicitly or explicitly suggest that Jesus Christ is God.⁸⁹⁵ Jesus' own statements regarding his identity and unique relationship with the Father left little doubt that he was both human and divine.⁸⁹⁶ Paul stated that Jesus was 'God, blessed overall' (Romans 9:5) yet, he emphasizes his full humanity (1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2). Other New Testament writers do the same.⁸⁹⁷ Indeed, Christ acknowledged that worship belonged to the Father, '...the one true and living God.'⁸⁹⁸ Finally, on one occasion Jesus told his disciples that in seeing him they see the Father,⁸⁹⁹ an obvious affirmation of their unity.

Affirming Jesus' deity raised questions about his true humanity. That is, if he was truly God, how could he truly be human. Conversely, how was it possible for a human being to be truly divine or deity. If Christ was both God and Man, how could he possibly possess two natures and yet remain one person. Explaining the mystery of God in Christ within a Christian framework did not always produce good results. Several attempts to solve the mystery resulted in a number of heterodox theologies in early Christianity. For example, the Ebonite's, acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah but denied his divinity.⁹⁰⁰ The Docetists taught that the body of Christ *seemed* to be human and that he did not really

892 Colossians 2:9

893 N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), 66, 67.

894 W.F. Howard, *Christianity According to St. John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), 80.

895 John 1:18; 8:58; 10:30; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13

896 Matthew 4:7; Mark 9:37; John 5:17-21

897 Matthew 5:48; Mark 1:11; Luke 2:49; John. 5:17-30

898 John 4:23, 24

899 John 14:1-17

900 Schaff, *Christianity*, 429-433.

suffer and die.⁹⁰¹ The Cerinthians taught that Jesus was not the Christ except for the period between his baptism and crucifixion.⁹⁰² Dynamic Monarchianism held that Jesus became Christ at his baptism and that the Father adopted him after his death.⁹⁰³ Modalistic Monarchianism maintained that the one God revealed himself in different ways or ‘modes’ of being,⁹⁰⁴ so that while Jesus Christ was fully God, he was human in appearance but not a distinct Person in the godhead.⁹⁰⁵ The error of these groups was to emphasize the humanity of Christ at the expense of his deity or his deity at the expense of his humanity. However, both extremes denied the Incarnation and therefore rejected the message of redemption. Indeed, the early Christians believed that unless Christ was God in human flesh, there could be no final atonement and no Christianity.⁹⁰⁶ Christology and soteriology therefore gives redemptive significance to the Incarnation.

The question of Jesus’ nature and his relationship with the Father forced Christians to re-evaluate their theological idea of God, and to revise their philosophical idea of unity.⁹⁰⁷ While the decisions of Nicaea (c. 325) and Chalcedon (c. 451) produced the guiding principles for recognizing that Christ was fully human and fully divine, they did not fully solve the mystery of how the divine and human natures relate to each other.⁹⁰⁸ Indeed, Christology and the nature of the Godhead, dominated the Patristic period.⁹⁰⁹

Patristic Christology

The Patristic period began around 100 A.D. and extended to 451 A.D. During this time, the early Christians debated a number of theological issues central to the development of church doctrine. Some of these Christians, known as the early fathers’, wrote not long after the Apostles had died. These figures included Clement of Rome (c. 96), Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-110), Polycarp (c. 69-155), and Papias (c. 60-130). Their writings include letters addressing ethical and liturgical practices to exhorting believers to keep the faith in the midst of persecution.⁹¹⁰ However, within a short period of time, Christians began to experience persecution from Roman emperors, pagan philosophers, Jews, and a whole host of competing philosophies. As a result, a number of the Apologists began defending the Christian Faith against these attacks. They presented well-reasoned arguments for the unity of God,

901 Ibid., 497.

902 John Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1979), 93.

903 Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 111.

904 Ibid., 78.

905 Schaff, 571-573.

906 Bray, *Creeeds*, 70.

907 Hodgson, 98.

908 McGrath, 64.

909 Ibid., 32.

910 For details of these and others see, Frederic W. Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography*, Vol. 1, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907).

embracing monotheism over polytheism, and why the divinity of Christ and other doctrines were justifiable. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), Tatian (c. 110-180), Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-200), Tertullian (c. 160-220), and Origen (c. 185-254), are the more notable apologists of this period. Several of these individuals wrote lengthy treatises refuting Gnostic heresies. Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* (c. 180) is a monumental refutation of Docetism (a variation of Gnosticism). He was the '...first Christian thinker to attempt to formulate the meaning of the person and work of Christ in a systematic way.'⁹¹¹ Indeed, his understanding of the deity of Christ, while 'superimposed on a vague understanding of God,' is well developed.⁹¹²

Tertullian contrasted the unity of God and Christ with Gnostic dualism. Moreover, his treatment of Trinitarianism refuted the notion that by affirming that God is three, and yet, one, was polytheism.⁹¹³ Perhaps, with the exception of Origen, he more than any other, anticipated the orthodoxy of Nicaea. Indeed, Origen '...provided the key that enabled the church subsequently to affirm, at the Council of Nicaea, that the Son is...of one substance with the Father.'⁹¹⁴ However, Tertullian contributed significantly to early Trinitarian thought thereby saving the Scriptures for the church and thus, the historical foundations of the Christian faith.⁹¹⁵

The Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers wrote from the fourth century onward, defending orthodoxy in the face of heretical teaching. Some of the more notable fathers were Athanasius (c. 296-393), Jerome (c. 342-420), and, Augustine of Hippo (c. 354-430).

While the second and third century rejection of heterodox theologies failed to unify Christian's regarding the person, nature, and work of Christ, they did affirm his unique status with the Father. Indeed, the Apostles referred to his unique status in unmistakable terms.⁹¹⁶ The early fathers' also spoke of his deity and his humanity.⁹¹⁷ However, while the early Christians produced 'clear-cut judicial definitions of traditional beliefs,'⁹¹⁸ it was not until the fourth and fifth centuries that they finally produced a 'philosophically thought-out theology' in their adoption of the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds.⁹¹⁹

From the early fourth century through the fifth, Christians were involved in philosophical debate regarding Christ's dual nature. However, the rise of new heresy forced them to reconsider the finer points of Christology. Eventually, two major schools of thought emerged with contrasting

⁹¹¹ Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 80.

⁹¹² Ibid., 81.

⁹¹³ Tertullian is the first to use the Latin term *trinitas* to describe the nature of God as both three (*trias*) and one (*unitas*). See *ap.* 17.1.

⁹¹⁴ Brown, 90.

⁹¹⁵ Shelley, 85.

⁹¹⁶ The Apostle John refers to Jesus as the 'only begotten God' (John 1:18). See J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 124,125.

⁹¹⁷ For example, Ignatius refers to Jesus as 'the Christ God.' As cited in Geoffrey Bromiley, *Historical Theology: an Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 4.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

interpretations of scripture: the Alexandrian School and the Antiochene School. The Alexandrian School interpreted the Scriptures allegorically while the Antiochene School interpreted them literally. The Alexandrian School emphasized the divinity of Christ whereas the Antiochene School emphasized Christ's complete humanity. While Alexandrian theology tended to reflect aspects of Platonism (i.e. metaphysical or mystical underpinnings), Antiochene theology reflected aspects of Aristotelianism (i.e. factual, historical). Additionally, the Alexandrian School was motivated by soteriological concerns while the Antiochene School focused on the moral work of Christ's life and hence, his humanity.

The Alexandrian School was founded around 180 AD. by the former Stoic, Pantaenus, who sought to synthesize Platonic and Christian thought. He was convinced that Greek philosophical ideas were to some extent, compatible with Christianity, and not contradictory. He reasoned that just as the law prepared the Hebrews for Christ, Greek philosophy prepared the Greeks for Christ. Accordingly, Pantaenus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, all utilize Greek terms to communicate the Gospel.⁹²⁰ Because Clement was indebted to Greek philosophy, most scholars regard him as one of the first great Christian Platonist.⁹²¹ Clement believed that because God was the source of all truth, reconciling Hellenistic philosophy with Christian philosophy was paramount. While Origen depended much less on Greek philosophy than Clement, his Christology reflects some dependence on Clement.⁹²² Both Clement and Origen taught that in the incarnation the Logos '...assumed human nature in its entirety, body and soul, and thus became a real man, the God-man.'⁹²³ However, Clement's concept of Christ has more in common with the Docetists in that he degrades the human nature of Christ, asserting that he was incapable of experiencing such emotions as joy and grief.⁹²⁴ Origen on the other hand, maintained that the soul of Christ, in its preexistence, was united with the Logos and in the incarnation assumed a body that underwent divinization by the Logos.⁹²⁵ He also taught that the Father is superior to the Son, the supreme agent of the creation.⁹²⁶ Indeed, it appears that Origen's subordinationism paved the way for the anti-Trinitarian errors of Arius. However, he clearly affirms that the 'Godhead is plainly the Second Person',⁹²⁷ and while created, he does not resemble the 'god of Platonism.'⁹²⁸ Whatever defects attributed to his view of the Godhead, Origen firmly believed that '...had God not become incarnate, we should never have known him as a Trinity.'⁹²⁹

920 As with Justin Martyr (*I Apol.* 5.46.), Clement also made copious use of the *logos* concept. See Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

921 Shelley, 81

922 Charles Kannengiesser, 'Christology' in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, John Anthony McGuckin, ed., (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 73, 74; Norris, *The Christological*, 17.

923 Berkhof, 73.

924 Ibid.

925 McGuckin, John Anthony, "'The Road to Nicaea'" *Christian History & Biography* Winter, no. 85 (2005): 18-23.

926 *PArch* 2.6.3., as cited in Edwards, *Origen*, 85.

927 Ibid., 74.

928 McGuckin, John Anthony, 'The Road to Nicaea' *Christian History & Biography* Winter, no. 85 (2005): 18-23.

929 *PArch* 2.6.3., as cited in Edwards, 85.

The presbyter Lucian (d. 312) founded the Antiochene School in Syria around 200 A.D. The principle representatives of this school were Diodore of Tarsus (d. ca. 390), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428), and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393-458). The Antiochene theologians were more practical than the Alexandrian theologians because they were interested in what Jesus did rather than in the relationship between his two natures.⁹³⁰ That is, they were more concerned about the ethics of Jesus than his ontological relationship with the Father.⁹³¹ Accordingly, the Antiochene theologians emphasized Christ's perfection and obedience as being vital to understanding one's salvation. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia, believed that the difference between the indwelling of God in Christ and believers was by degree only.⁹³² That is, the moral indwelling of the Logos essentially enabled Jesus to reach moral perfection 'faster than other men.'⁹³³ Again, the Antiochene's emphasized the moral indwelling of the Logos in Jesus rather than the incarnation itself.⁹³⁴ Needless to say, this view agreed with the Nestorian position which extolled Christ as God not because he was God, but because God was in him. In other words, '...the man Christ is not God, but a God-bearer...a possessor of the Godhead.'⁹³⁵

Some scholars define Orthodoxy as 'conformity to a recognized creed or standard of public doctrine,' and heresy as 'a willful departure from it.'⁹³⁶ Moreover, straying from apostolic doctrine meant departing from orthodoxy while improving upon it in some significant way. Detractors from Orthodoxy believed that they could provide a more adequate explanation for the mystery of God in Christ than others. This attitude was prevalent in early Christianity. For example, Arius of Alexandria (c. 250-336) rejected normative Christian doctrine and opposed Gnostic and Monarchian thinking, in order to advance his own views.⁹³⁷ Despite contemporary thinking, Arius was convinced that his view was superior to all others.⁹³⁸ However, his Christology ends in theological disaster. That is, he denied Christ's identity as true God and true Man. He, like others, stressed the unity of the Person at the expense of the two distinct natures, or emphasized the two natures at the expense of the unity of the Person.⁹³⁹ Arianism, Apollinarianism, and Eutychianism, committed similar errors.

The Arian Controversy

Arianism was a response to the Monarchianism of the second and third centuries. While it attempted to explain the mystery of the human and divine in Christ, as with Monarchianism, it failed to

930 Brown, 168.

931 Ibid.

932 Berkhof, 104.

933 Brown, 169.

934 Berkhof, 104.

935 Ibid., 105.

936 Schaff, 513.

937 Brown, 112.

938 McGuckin, 19.

939 Berkhof, 102.

adequately solve the mystery. That is, rather than solving the problem, Arianism actually made it more complex. Arius believed that because Christ (the Son) was the first and greatest of all created beings, he had a beginning and was not eternal nor did he possess the divine essence.⁹⁴⁰ Christians, on the other hand, maintained that unless Christ was God in human flesh, there was no final atonement and no Christianity. Accordingly, scholars generally sum up the Arian attitude in four basic propositions: (1) the Son must be a creature created by the Father out of nothing; (2) the Son must have had a beginning; (3) the Son has no communion with or direct knowledge of his Father; and, (4) the Son is a demigod.⁹⁴¹

Around 320 A.D. Arius challenged the bishops of Alexandria, particularly, his own bishop, Alexander of Alexandria (c. 313- 326). Unlike Arius, Alexander taught that the Son was eternal and uncreated.⁹⁴² In an effort to ward off the attacks of Arius, he sent letters to various bishops urging them to reject the teachings of Arius. The differences between Alexander and Arius became the center of a heated debate. Alexander defended the doctrine of the co-eternity of the Logos while Arius preached that ‘...there was a time when the Son was not.’⁹⁴³ Eventually, Emperor Constantine intervened in order to maintain the the unity of the empire.⁹⁴⁴ He attempted to resolve the crisis by addressing a joint letter to Alexander and Arius.⁹⁴⁵ However, the conflict became bitter after Alexander openly condemned the teachings of Arius. He was immediately removed from office. Arius responded by appealing to the people and to a number of prominent bishops in Alexandria. Things began to deteriorate to the point of dividing the entire Eastern Church if things remained unresolved. As a consequence, Constantine decided to summon bishops from all parts of the Empire to attend the first ecumenical council at Nicaea.

The Council of Nicaea convened in 325 A.D. in order to deal with the ‘destabilizing Christological disagreements’ within the empire.⁹⁴⁶ Some 318 bishops attend the meeting. A group led by Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. ca. 341), sympathetic with the Arian view, hoped that the assembly would vindicate Arius and rebuke Alexander for having condemned his teachings.⁹⁴⁷ However, Alexander and Athanasius, the future bishop of Alexandria,⁹⁴⁸ argue that to regard Christ as a creature, is to deny saving faith in him.⁹⁴⁹ Moreover, Christ had to be both human and divine in order to accomplish the will of God.⁹⁵⁰ For this reason, Athanasius argued that Arianism has no real basis for salvation.⁹⁵¹ The Arian's countered arguing that *homoiousios* (‘of similar substance’) be used to describe the Son’s

940 William G. Rusch, trans/ed., *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 30.

941 Kelly, *Early Christian*, 227-230.

942 Ibid., 33-44.

943 Rusch, 30.

944 Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol.1, (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), 159.

945 Hall, 125,126. See also J. Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337* (London: SPCK, 1968), 352-354.

946 McGrath, 33.

947 González, 164.

948 Athanasius’ *Orations against the Arians* (362) summarizes Arian doctrine and puts forth a stringent defense in favor of the Nicene position. See, Rusch, *The Trinitarian*, 63-129.

949 Berkhof, 85.

relationship with the Father. In the end, the council rejected the Arian position declaring that Jesus was *homoousios* ('one in being' or 'of one substance') with the Father, thus favoring the divinity of Christ.⁹⁵² The council therefore adopts a creed that declared, '...the Son is begotten from the Father as only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made...'.⁹⁵³ Nicaea therefore affirmed both Christ's and the Apostles' teachings.⁹⁵⁴ While Arius' views were condemned, his teaching did not die out in the early church.⁹⁵⁵ Indeed, the Arians fought back at the Third Council of Sirmium in 357 and gain ground at the synods of Nice in 359 and Constantinople in 360, where they were able to get Arian creeds passed.⁹⁵⁶ However, Arianism became so pervasive that Jerome stated, '...the whole world groaned and marveled to find itself Arian.'⁹⁵⁷ It took the next twenty years for the Cappadocian theologians, Basil of Caesarea (d. ca. 379), Gregory of Nazianzus (d. ca. 390), and Gregory of Nyssa (d. ca. 395), to save *homoousios* theology.⁹⁵⁸ Finally, in 381 the Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the decisions of Nicaea, producing a revised Nicene Creed while banning the remaining Arian deviations.⁹⁵⁹ Accordingly, the affirmation of the consubstantiality⁹⁶⁰ of the Holy Spirit and the Son, essentially put an end to the Trinitarian controversy.⁹⁶¹

The Apollinarian Controversy

The second major Christological controversy centered on the errant views of Apollinarius of Laodicea (d. ca. 390). As with others, Apollinarius' Christology developed out of soteriological concerns.⁹⁶² Apollinarius sought to provide an adequate explanation for the human and the divine in Jesus Christ. While he rejected the Arian position, he was well aware of the orthodoxy of Athanasius

950 Walker, 110.

951 Ibid.

952 McGrath, 33.

953 Ibid., 49.

954 Athanasius., as cited in Kelley, 45.

955 Hall, Christopher, A. 'How Arianism Almost Won.' *Christian History & Biography* Winter, no. 85 (2005): 36-38.

956 McKim, 16.

957 Hence, the Latin, *Altercatio Luciferiani et Orthodoxi*, 19 (PL 23, 172C).

958 Placher, 76-79.

959 Kelly, 238.

960 From the Latin translation of the Greek term, *homoousios* meaning 'of same substance' see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 139,140.

961 Kelly, 263.

962 Ibid., 291.

and therefore constructed a Christology that affirmed three things: (1) the unity of the Godhead and manhood in Christ; (2) the full deity of Christ; and, (3) a rejection of a moral development in Christ's life.⁹⁶³ However, Apollinarius questioned whether Jesus had a human soul (a human center of consciousness) or whether the divine Logos absorbed it. He concluded that the Logos displaced the rational soul of Jesus creating in him 'one composite nature.'⁹⁶⁴ In other words, the human and the divine share the same life: the mind of Christ is the eternal Logos.⁹⁶⁵ While the Christ of Apollinarianism, possessed a fully human body, he had a purely divine mind and is was not human in the proper sense of the term. Of course, if Jesus did not possess a human soul, humans cannot claim salvation. In other words, '...if the Logos did not assume human nature in its integrity, He [Jesus] could not be our perfect Redeemer.'⁹⁶⁶

The Apollinarian position was defective because it affirmed the full deity of Christ, but denied his full humanity. As we have seen, the Arian view affirmed the humanity of Christ but denied his deity. Both positions rejected the biblical view that requires Jesus to be fully human and fully God in order to save humanity. Indeed, both deny the Incarnation. Needless to say, Apollinarism was later condemned at a synod in Rome in 374 and at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

While Apollinarism met its fate at Constantinople, it had already influenced a number of well-known thinkers including Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350- 428) and Nestorius (c. 386-451), Archbishop of Constantinople. Theodore, a leading representative of the Antiochene School, substituted the incarnation for the indwelling of the Logos in the man Jesus.⁹⁶⁷ While Chalcedon recognized him as orthodox, he was later condemned as heretical because Nestorius' Christology essentially depended upon his.⁹⁶⁸

Once Nestorius became Archbishop of Constantinople, he injected himself in the middle of the debate over Jesus' relationship to his mother. He argued that God could not have a mother because no human can bear the divine.⁹⁶⁹ He therefore rejected the term *theotokos* ('God-bearing') which was used to describe Mary as the mother of God.⁹⁷⁰ Nestorius taught that the Logos indwelt the person of Jesus, making him a '...God-bearing man rather than the God-Man.'⁹⁷¹ Cyril of Alexandria (c. 375 – 444) was aware of Nestorius' teachings and wrote several letters urging him to accept the orthodox position.⁹⁷² After making the case against Nestorius before Pope Celestine Cyril gained enough support to deal with the matter once for all. Cyril promptly issued a warning to Nestorius to recant or face excommunication. Nestorius in turn, persuaded the Emperor Theodosius II to call a general council in

963 F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 70.

964 Norris, 22.

965 Seitz, 60.

966 Berkhof, 103.

967 Ibid., 104.

968 Brown, 168.

969 McKim, 38.

970 Norris, 124.

971 Berkhof, 105.

972 Norris, 131-135.

order to adjudicate between himself and Cyril. After considerable testimony and heated discussion from representatives on both sides of the debate, they appealed to the Emperor to resolve the matter. After considerable political persuasion, the Emperor expelled Nestorius from the capital.⁹⁷³ Indeed, the Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned Nestorian ‘Christological dualism,’ once for all.⁹⁷⁴

The Eutychian Error

Not long after the Ephesian council, Eutyches (c. 378-454) began teaching that Christ had only one nature (*monophysitism*), not two, as Cyril eloquently defended. While he maintained that Christ originally possessed two natures following the incarnation, the divine so absorbed the human that it revealed only the divine.⁹⁷⁵ That is, Christ’s human attributes were ‘assimilated to the divine...so that his body was not consubstantial with ours and He was not human in the proper sense of the word.’⁹⁷⁶ In 448 A.D., a synod in Constantinople condemned Eutyches. However, he garnered the support of Dioscorus (d. ca 454), Patriarch of Alexandria who requested that Emperor Theodosius II call a council to deal with the controversy surrounding Eutyches. The council convened in 449 where Dioscorus defended Eutyches’ adherence to both the Nicene Creed and to Ephesus. Eutyches is therefore, reinstated. Not everyone agrees. Pope Leo I (c. – 440-461) called it the ‘Robber Council’.⁹⁷⁷ He eventually convinced the new Emperor Marcian (c. 396 – 457) to summon an ecumenical council at Chalcedon, which takes place in 451, to reaffirm the orthodox doctrine against the heresy of Eutyches and the Monophysites.

The council not only reaffirmed the decrees of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, it approved the teachings of Cyril against Nestorius and the *Tome* of Pope Leo I to Flavian (d. ca. 449), bishop of Constantinople.⁹⁷⁸ Most importantly, the council further clarified the Nicene doctrine of Christ, stating that he has ‘...two natures, human and divine, unmixed, unchanged, undivided, and inseparable.’⁹⁷⁹ That is, Christ was human and divine in one person. Chalcedon essentially repudiated the errors of Arius, Apollinarius, and Eutyches. However, the Chalcedonian rejection of the Nestorian and Monophysite errors did not prevent them from spreading to other regions beyond the empire, as the Monophysites had a large following in Egypt and in the surrounding territories.⁹⁸⁰ Nor did the decisions of Chalcedon put an end to all Christological questions or bring ultimate peace to the empire. However, the divide between those accepting the Chalcedonian definition and the Monophysites, who rejected it, reached its apex in the sixth century at the Fifth General Council. Indeed, this same council allegedly condemned Origen for embracing preexistence of souls and by implication, reincarnation.

973 Shelley, 113.

974 Norris, 28.

975 Brown, 179.

976 Berkhof, 106.

977 Shelley, 114.

978 F. Schaefer, ‘Council of Chalcedon’ in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company), 1908. See, New Advent: < <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03555a.htm>> Accessed March 3, 2007.

979 Berkhof, 107, 108.

980 William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: an Introduction* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1983), 84.

Determining whether Origen was condemned at the Fifth General Council, requires that we first examine an earlier time when he became the focus of two crises that bear his name. Knowing more about them will explain why some scholars mistakenly arrive at the conclusions that they do regarding the more controversial aspects of his theology. Moreover, it will help determine whether the Origenist faithfully represented Origen.⁹⁸¹ Finally, it will answer the all-important question of *whom* or *what* was ‘anathematized’ at the Second Council of Constantinople, and put to rest the claim that clerics in the sixth century excised reincarnation from the Bible.

Origen and Origenism

Origen was arguably the most prolific scholar of his age and one of the first great Christian philosophers. While he was a profound student of the Bible, scholars debate whether some of his views were orthodox, heretical, or represented aspects both. That is, while Origen’s basic theology appears to be orthodox, at times he went beyond the confines of Scripture and the Rule of Faith in order to explain Christian belief. Accordingly, scholars disagree as to the extent to which he capitulates to Greek ideas. As Origen’s reputation grew, he gained both friends and enemies.⁹⁸² Some followers were determined to advance his thinking, while others distorted his teachings in order to bring him disrepute. Detractors such as Methodius of Olympus (d. ca. 311), Peter of Alexandria (d. ca. 311), and Eustathius of Antioch (d. ca. 360), were especially critical of Origen’s speculative doctrines such as pre-existence of souls, *apokatastasis* (final restoration),⁹⁸³ the mode of resurrection, and, the subordination of the Son to the Father.⁹⁸⁴

Scholars also differ as to what actually constitutes Origenism. Some scholars focus on the disputed questions of the fourth century while others, focus on doctrinal controversies that appear to originate with Origen. However, Origenism generally refers to doctrines attributed to Origen that were not his. Indeed, Origenism is best represented by Evagrus Ponticus (c. 345 – 399) and the Egyptian and Palestinian monks of the second half of the fourth century. Evagrus’ most famous work was *Kephalaia Gnostica* (lit., ‘Chapters of Knowledge’), which later became the basis of condemnation by the Orthodox against Origenism.⁹⁸⁵ Despite their differences of opinion, most scholars agree that Origenism consists of six successive moments.⁹⁸⁶ We present them here in abbreviated form: the first moment refers to the speculations which constitutes the basis of later Origenism; the second moment

981 For a scholarly treatment of Origenism, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

982 A comprehensive list of the early follower’s of Origen is in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* (H.E. 6). For a concise list of the disciples of Origen, see McGuckin, *The Westminster*, *ibid*, 86-91.

983 For a lengthy discussion on this see Celia E. Rabinowitz’s doctoral dissertation submitted to the department of Theology of Fordham University entitled ‘Apokatastasis and Sunteleia: Eschatological and Soteriological Speculation in Origen,’ New York, 1989.

984 Details regarding these charges against Origen are in Clark, 85-158.

985 For details regarding this work, see Antoine Guillaumont. *Les six centuries’ des "Kephalaia Gnostica"* *Patrologia Orientalis* 28.1. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958.

986 Henry Crouzel, as cited by Abraam Sleman, Markos Ayoub, and Daniel Abdelmaseih, ‘Origen and Origenism’ *St. Mark Coptic Church*, 1998-2005. <<http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/patrology/schoolofalex2/chapter04.html>> Accessed March 6, 2007.

refers to Origenism as understood by his third and fourth century's detractors (Methodius, Peter of Alexandria, and Eustathius of Antioch); the third moment is Origenism as represented by the Egyptian and Palestinian monks in the second half of the fourth century and espoused by Evagrius of Ponticus; the fourth moment refers to the time when the fourth and fifth century anti-Origenist's (Epiphanius, Jerome and Theophilus of Alexandria), opposed Origen, while John of Jerusalem and Rufinus of Aquileia, defended him; the fifth moment refers to the Origenist controversy of the first half of the sixth century; the sixth and final moment refers to the Emperor Justinian's condemnation directed against the Origenist monks at Jerusalem.⁹⁸⁷ While we cannot present an exhaustive account of these moments, we will provide an overview of these crises, and then examine the details surrounding the Fifth General Council.

The First Origenist Crisis

The first Origenist crisis begins in the deserts of Egypt and then in Palestine in the second half of the fourth century with the monks of Nitria. The uneducated majority (the *anthropomorphites*) contend that God has a body that can be seen and touched, while the educated minority (lead by the *Tall Brothers*- Dioscorus, Ammonius, Eusebius, and Euthymius), contend that God is invisible and transcendent. The monks passion for the teachings of Origen eventually prompts Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (d. ca. 403), to put an end to its theological and philosophical dangers⁹⁸⁸. Epiphanius regards himself an authority on Christian deviations⁹⁸⁹ and in 375 produces the *Ancoratus* ('The Well-Anchored') urging believers to be anchored against the errors of heresy.

In 376 Epiphanius composed the *Panarion* or 'Medicine chest,' a list of remedies to offset the 'poisons' of heresy.⁹⁹⁰ In 394, Epiphanius traveled to Jerusalem to preach against the errors of Origen and to oppose John, Bishop of Jerusalem (c. 356 – 419), a well-known supporter of Origen. Just prior to this (393), Aterbius (a monk of Sceta) circulated a petition for Origen's censure throughout the Palestinian monasteries. Rufinus (c. 344 – 410) rejected the petition.⁹⁹¹ Jerome (c. 347 – 420), a former student of Origen and a long time friend, agreed to condemn him.⁹⁹² As a result, a series of heated exchanges began between these two regarding the place and importance of Origen in church history.⁹⁹³

Around 399, Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria (c. 385 – 412) attempted to negotiate reconciliation between the parties. However, on the one hand he was sympathetic towards John, and on the other, he wanted to establish control over the Nitrian monks who were largely Origenist. Despite the dilemma, he wrote a paschal letter (399) defending the orthodox position. This drew the anger of

987 *Les fins dernières selon Origène* (Brookfield, VT: Gower Publishing Company, 1990).

988 Clark, 86-121.

989 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 184.

990 This work is divided into three books (seven volumes in all) treating some eighty heresys. See Caloggero Riggi, 'La forma del corpo risorto secondo Metodio in Epifanio' (*Haer.* 64), 75-92. Epiphanius deals with Origen in sections 100-109 in his *Ancoratus*. It is in Greek only with an adjoining Latin translation in Migne, *PG* 43.

991 Clark, 159-193

992 Ibid, 121-151.

993 Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, 433-445.

the monks prompting them to travel to the city where they caused an uproar, and threaten to kill him. Theophilus reversed himself and instead of defending John against the charges of Epiphanius, he suppressed the teachings of the Origenist. He then traveled to Constantinople and challenged John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407) for allegedly harboring the Origenist' after their expulsion from Egypt.⁹⁹⁴ As a consequence, Epiphanius finally condemns Origen's books at the Council of Alexandria in 400, expels the Origenist' monks from Nitria (issuing paschal letters in 401, 402, and 404 against the doctrines of Origen), and appealed to Pope Anastasius (398-401) to officially condemn Origenism represented especially by Evagrus and Didymus the Blind. He also managed to pacify the anthropomorphite monks and resume contact with some of the leading Origenist' in Egypt.⁹⁹⁵ While the first Origenist crisis appeared to be settled, the same issues resurfaced in the sixth century with the second Origenist crisis.

The Second Origenist Crisis

The second major Origenist crisis began around the first half of the sixth century when Origenism was spreading in areas around Jerusalem. At the same time, a hybrid form of Evagrianism was becoming popular among the Palestinian monks through the teachings of Stephen bar Sudayle.⁹⁹⁶ The differences between these monks eventually lead to the formation of two parties: the *Isochrusti* (extremist monks emphasizing aspects of Origen's speculations) and the *Protoktists* (moderate monks stressing Origen's theory of the soul of Jesus).⁹⁹⁷ The *Protoktists* eventually appealed to the Emperor Justinian (c. 483 – 565) to censure the teaching of the *Isochrusti*. Theodore Askidas, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (d. ca. 558), an ardent defender of Origenism, had already attended a synod in 540 that condemned the Monophysites, and had considerable influence over Justinian. Pelagius (c. 350 – 418) and Menas (Patriarch of Constantinople, 536-552), knew of his influence of over Justinian and were able to convince the Emperor to address the matter. He finally called a local synod at Constantinople in 543, where he reviewed the *Letter to Menas* from Pope Vigilius,⁹⁹⁸ selections from Origen's *Arch*, and ten propositions considered heretical.

Persuaded that Origen's teachings (or those ascribed to him) were heretical, Justinian issued a decree of condemnation and sent a copy of the edict to the Oriental patriarchs and to Pope Vigilius (537-555) for their endorsement.⁹⁹⁹ Askidas also signs the petition in order to secure his position as Archbishop of Caesarea. However, while the synod condemned Origenism, no general council confirmed it. Indeed, it was not until the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, that Origenism was officially condemned.

994 Chadwick, *The Early*, *ibid*, 186. See also, J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom- Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 191-210.

995 Harding, 165.

996 An account of this is found in Cyril of Scythopolis' *Vita Sabae* or 'Life of St. Saba' and in *Liberatus, Breviarium*,²³ see also, William Holden Hutton, *The Church of the Sixth Century* (London/New York/Bombay: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1903), 156-162.

997 Harding, *ibid*.

998 This was one of two letters drafted in 540 by Pope Vigilius regarding his position on Monophysitism. One went to Justinian and the other to Menas affirming the decisions of Ephesus, Chalcedon, and his predecessor, Pope Leo I.

999 See Appendix B. See also, Chadwick, *The Church*, 613.

Askidas knew of Justinian's desire to unify the empire theologically. However, this required that he abolish heresy. The Monophysites had grown significantly in the broader region and was tied to Nestorianism. Askidas knew this and persuaded the Emperor that the growth of Nestorianism was due to the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the father of Nestorianism and enemy of Origen. An attack against Nestorianism was an attack against the rival movement of Monophysitism.¹⁰⁰⁰ Askidas knew also that by condemning the Monophysites, he would be affirming the decisions of Chalcedon regarding the two natures of Christ. Indeed, the acceptance of Chalcedon was essentially the only way to advance the emperor's political career and to recover the West.¹⁰⁰¹

Askidas and Theodora (the emperor's wife) convinced Justinian to condemn certain books of Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393 – 460) along with a letter of Ibas, bishop of Edessa (c. 435 – 457) to the Persian bishop, Maris.¹⁰⁰² The Monophysites argued that Chalcedon declared them orthodox while Theodoret of Mopsuestia, was uncensored. Despite this, Justinian issued an edict in 543 condemning Theodore of Mopsuestia along with The Three Chapters, intending to ratify it at a later council. The Eastern Patriarchs disagreed with the edit but later conceded under pressure. The West considered it a direct assault on the decisions of Chalcedon. Accordingly, a number of bishops were strongly opposed from the beginning.¹⁰⁰³

Securing the unity of the empire meant that Justinian needed the support of the bishop of Rome, Pope Vigilius. However, instead of agreeing with the Emperor's edict, Vigilius excommunicated those supporting it. He also refused to go to Constantinople at the emperor's request. Pope Vigilius finally agreed to go but when he arrived, he publicly opposed the edit and attempted to excommunicate Menas. The emperor's wife intervened on his behalf and helped secure his position. After studying several extracts from the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Vigilius was convinced that they were heretical. However, he did not want to appear to question the authority of Chalcedon or Pope Leo, so he refused to sign the edict. However, he promised the Emperor and his wife that he would later publish an independent judgment on the matter, which he did in 548, in his *Judicatum* against the Three Chapters. His actions however, stirred western ecclesiastical opinion against him and he withdrew it. However, he refused to subscribe to a second edict by Justinian against the Three Chapters and had to seek refuge for fear of his life. Justinian and Pope Vigilius finally agreed that resolving their differences and bringing stability to the region would require a general council.

The Second Council of Constantinople (553)

The Second Council of Constantinople was the time and place where Origen is allegedly condemned for embracing preexistence of souls and by implication, reincarnation. It is also when clerics allegedly removed reincarnation from the Bible.¹⁰⁰⁴ As we have mentioned, scholars disagree with respect to Origen and transmigration. Some scholars argue that ecclesiastical authorities removed reincarnation from the Bible in order to exercise authority over the masses. They reasoned that if Christians knew that their salvation depended on more than one lifetime, they would not submit to

¹⁰⁰⁰ Constantelos, 76.

¹⁰⁰¹ Chadwick, 209.

¹⁰⁰² Brown, 186.

¹⁰⁰³ Facundus, Bishop of Hermiane (6th century), *Pro Defensione trium capitulorum.*, Cross, 490.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See, A. A. Taliaferro, 'The Law of Reincarnation from the Continuity of Life.'

<http://www.cypressrose.com/Tolly_html/Reincarnation.htm> Copyright, 1989, Accessed July 16, 2007.

church authority or believe in hell or damnation. Other scholars argue that the ban on reincarnation was the ‘...result of an historical error and contains no ecclesiastical authority whatsoever.’¹⁰⁰⁵ However, scholarly opinion must be determined by a thorough examination of the facts surrounding the Fifth General Council. Moreover, investigating the central issues of the council will answer the all-important question of *whom* or *what* is anathematized.

Sorting Out the Facts

The Emperor Justinian summoned The Fifth Ecumenical Council on May 5, 553, in the city of Constantinople. While the assembly essentially represented the last phase of the conflict inaugurated by the edict of Justinian in 543 against Origenism,¹⁰⁰⁶ the council’s focus centered on Nestorianism and on individuals sympathetic to its teachings. Pope Vigilius refused to attend the meetings because of the disproportionate number of Western bishops present as compared to the number of Eastern bishops in attendance. He also feared that if he were to attend, an outbreak of violence may ensue.¹⁰⁰⁷ However, the council convened, presided over by Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople. Justinian opened the meetings with the intent of settling religious controversies, just as other emperors did before him.¹⁰⁰⁸ After inquiring whether it was proper to anathematize the dead, the Emperor introduced the central issues surrounding the the Three Chapters (a general attack on Antiochene Christology).¹⁰⁰⁹ According to Evagrius, Justinian sought the opinions of the bishops regarding Theodore Mopsuestia, Theodoret against Cyril and his tree chapters, and the contents of the letter of Ibas addressed to Maris, the Persian.¹⁰¹⁰ After reading a number of passages from Theodore and Theodoret (over eight sessions extending to 2 June 553), the bishops anathematized Theodore and Theodoret as well as the letter of Ibas to Maris.¹⁰¹¹

Pope Vigilius finally sent Justinian his first *Constitutum*, signed by himself and sixteen other bishops (mostly Western) condemning the heretical propositions of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which included five anathemas repudiating his Christological teachings.¹⁰¹² On December 8, 553, Pope Vigilius sent a letter to Eutychius of Constantinople stating that he was mistaken and that the Three Chapters were rightly condemned. On February 23, 554, he issued his second *Constitutum* reiterating the ratification of the Council as implied by his letter to Eutychius.¹⁰¹³ Pope Vigilius was now free to

1005 See for example, Peter Andreas’ *Jenseits von Einstein* as cited in the article ‘Roman Emperor Responsible for Ban on Rebirth Doctrine’ as posted in Share International Magazine;
<http://www.spiritual.com.au/articles/reincarnation/rebirthban_share.html> Accessed July 24, 2007.

1006 *PG*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), 86: 945-990.

1007 Walker, 143.

1008 C.J. Hefele, trans., W.R. Clark, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, Vol.4 (Edinburgh, 1895), 298.

1009 Harding, 166; Constantelos, 91; and, Hefele, Vol. 4, 289.

1010 Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, trans., E. Walford (London: Bagster and Sons, 1846).

1011 Evagrius, as cited by Constantelos, 90.

1012 Chadwick, 624.

1013 Ibid.

return to Rome where he died shortly thereafter, on June 7, 555 A.D.

The Council issued fourteen anathemas (similar to those issued by Justinian in 543): the first anathema summarizes Nicene orthodoxy regarding consubstantiation of the Divine Persons. The second anathema is a further refutation of Arianism, appealing to the two nativities of the Word mentioned in the Nicene Creed: his eternal begetting from the Father and his Incarnation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. The third anathema defends the unity of Christ's Person against those who say that the Word was merely with or in Christ the man. The fourth anathema defines the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures in one subsistence being, opposing Nestorius, who acknowledged only the unity of the two natures under an abstract person-hood by which they could be commonly addressed by the same title. The fifth anathema is against those who believe that the celestial bodies are reasoning beings possessing souls. The sixth anathema reaffirms the Ephesian doctrine that the Blessed Virgin is truly the God-bearer, for she bore not a mere man, but God the Word is truly incarnate in her. The seventh anathema explains the Ephesian definition of faith as not entailing any confusion of natures, so neither nature was in any way changed into the other. The eighth anathema guards against the opposite error of Monophysitism, which speaks of one nature of God the Word made flesh. The ninth anathema clarified how Christ was to be worshiped, condemning those who would venerate the Word and the man separately, as well as those who exclude Christ's human flesh from veneration, or venerate it only as a part of some monstrous nature of confused divinity and humanity. The tenth anathema encapsulates the essence of orthodox Christology, affirming that the crucified Lord Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The eleventh anathema names, in chronological order, the major heresiarchs whose doctrine the Church has condemned in the past. The final three anathema's condemn the Three Chapters, using the same formula against the heretics of the past.¹⁰¹⁴ While the eleventh anathema includes Origen's name among a list of heretics, it appears last and out of order, which is why some scholars believe that it is an interpolation.¹⁰¹⁵ However, proponents of reincarnation argue that the matter of Origen is essentially settled.¹⁰¹⁶ Here is their assessment:

it is certain that the fifth general council was convoked exclusively to deal with the affair of the Three Chapters, *and that neither Origen nor Origenism were the cause of it*. 2. It is certain that the council opened on May, 553, in spite of the protestations of Pope Vigilius, who though at Constantinople refused to attend it, and that in the eight conciliary sessions (from 5 May to 2 June), the Acts of which we possess, *only the question of the Three Chapters is treated*; 3. Finally, it is certain that *only the Acts concerning the affair of the Three Chapters were submitted to the Pope for his approval*, which was given on 8 December, 553, and 23 February, 554; 4. It is a fact that Popes Vigilius, Pelagius I (556-61), Pelagius II (579-90), Gregory the Great (590-604), in treating of the fifth council deal only with the Three Chapters, *make no mention of Origenism, and speak as if they did not know of its condemnation*; 5.

¹⁰¹⁴ These are excerpts taken directly from a lengthier discussion by Daniel J. Castellano entitled 'Commentary on the Second Council of Constantinople' at: <http://www.arcaneknowledge.org>. Copyright 2007. Accessed June 19, 2007.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ernest Leigh-Bennett, *Handbook of the Early Christian Fathers* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1920), 100.

¹⁰¹⁶ The authors cite the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, under 'Origen', 311 and Vol. 4, 'Councils of Constantinople', 308-309. No date is given. They also cite Henry R. Percival in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 14, Series 2, (1900), 316, for further support.

It must be admitted that *before the opening of the council*, which had been delayed by the resistance of the pope, the bishops already assembled at Constantinople had to consider, by order of the emperor, *a form of Origenism that had practically nothing in common with Origen*, but which was held, we know, by one of the Origenist parties in Palestine; The bishops [at this extra-conciliary session referred to in No. 5 certainly subscribed to the fifteen anathemas proposed by the emperor [against Origen]; an admitted Origenist, Theodore of Scythopolin, was forced to retract; *but there is no proof that the approbation of the pope, who was at that time protesting against the convocation of the council, was asked*; It is easy to understand how this extra-conciliary sentence was *mistaken at a later period* for a decree of the actual ecumenical council.¹⁰¹⁷

Most scholars agree that neo-Gnostic authors appeal to earlier studies, in order to advance the 553 date as the time when reincarnation was condemned. For example, Steven Rosen cites Leslie D. Weatherhead for proof of reincarnation.¹⁰¹⁸ Weatherhead suggests that the early Church embraced reincarnation for the first ‘five hundred years of its existence.’¹⁰¹⁹ He also cites the 553 date as the time when reincarnation is officially condemned.¹⁰²⁰ Quincy Howe Jr. argues that the implication of Origen’s condemnation marks reincarnation as heresy and thus effectively removes it from the church.¹⁰²¹ Geddes MacGregor admits that while it is unclear whether Origen’s name is an interpolation, the Fifth Ecumenical Council’s attack on Origenism is ‘an attack on the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, and then by implication that of transmigration in any form...’¹⁰²²

However, it appears that the neo-Gnostics want it both ways. They argue on the one hand, that the Church *mistakenly* perpetuated the myth that Origen was condemned for embracing pre-existence of the souls and, by implication, reincarnation,¹⁰²³ and argue on the other hand, that he was condemned for embracing reincarnation, proving that it was a Christian doctrine until 553. However, neither position is correct, as reincarnation was not discussed at the Fifth General Council nor was anyone (including Origen) condemned for holding it. The claim therefore, that ecclesiastical authorities excised it from the Bible in 553, is false.

The mindset of the early Christians is revealed in both their understanding of early Christian doctrine, and in the decisions of the major ecumenical councils. They obviously have no interest in the subject of reincarnation. The finer points of Patristic Christology leads to the same conclusion. Indeed, the details surrounding the Origenist controversies and the decisions of the Fifth General Council, do not include references to reincarnation. There simply is no evidence supporting the

1017 Cranston & Head, 39-42. Geddes MacGregor echoes this same sentiment in *Reincarnation in Christianity* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1978), 55.

1018 Rosen, 70.

1019 Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Christian Agnostic* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 297.

1020 Ibid.

1021 Quincy Howe, Jr., *Reincarnation for the Christian* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), 83.

1022 Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982), 58.

1023 Cranston, 41.

contention that Christians embraced reincarnation at this time or that those in authority at the Fifth General Council excised it from the Bible. Rather, the early Christians were thoroughgoing monotheists and committed to Pauline theology. That is, while they struggled with the divine and human nature of Christ, they maintained that salvation was based on his vicarious atonement and not on karmic achievement or multiple rebirths. Had they understood that salvation depended in any way on reincarnation, Jesus would have taught it and passed it on to his disciples as divine truth. Instead, Jesus taught that salvation for the body and soul hinged on his life, death, and resurrection.¹⁰²⁴

It is not surprising, given Origen's tendency to speculate and go beyond the boundaries of orthodoxy, that some scholars consider his teachings heretical. However, he was often misunderstood, misquoted, and associated with teachings that were not his. Moreover, his doctrines of the preexistence of intelligence's or rational minds and *apokatastasis*, were erroneously associated with reincarnation or *metempsychosis*, a popular doctrine of his day. While the Fifth General Council condemned these doctrines, the particular canon that includes Origen's name, belonged to anathemas' issued at an earlier period.¹⁰²⁵ Moreover, the Fifth General Council addressed theological ideas associated with Evagrus and other prominent Origenist.' Indeed, neither Origen or the subject of reincarnation were addressed by those in attendance.

Despite this, neo-Gnostic authors cite this Council as proof that Origen was condemned for embracing preexistence of souls and reincarnation. However, one may embrace preexistence of souls and deny reincarnation. That is, even *if* Origen was condemned for holding preexistence of souls, it does not necessarily follow that he embraced reincarnation. Moreover, most scholars concede that Origen rejected transmigration of souls.¹⁰²⁶ Indeed, transmigration runs counter to the whole of Origen's system.¹⁰²⁷ It also contradicts the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. While not formally condemned, its implicit condemnation is evident at both the Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Florence (1439), where they declare that after death souls go immediately to heaven, purgatory, or hell.¹⁰²⁸

Arguing that Origen was condemned at the Fifth General Council for embracing reincarnation is not only a gross distortion of the facts, it is a bold attempt to revise church history. The Fifth General Council had nothing remotely to do with Origen or the excision of reincarnation from the Bible. One author said it best:

The ancient world was so flooded with the copies of the New Testament that it was well beyond the power of any officials to expunge certain uncomfortable doctrines from them. Therefore, we know with a high degree of certainty what the New Testament said about many different issues be-

1024 Matthew 15:4; 20:28; John 5: 24-29; 6:40; 14:6

1025 It reads, 'If anyone teaches the mythical doctrine of the preexistence of souls and the *apokatastasis* that follows from it, let him be anathema.' As stated in Jean Daniélou, *Origen* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 288.

1026 See for example, Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 107, 209, 213; John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 392-395; Riemer Roukema, *The Westminster*, 205-207; Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003, Reprint), 198ff; Jean Daniélou, 249, 250; and, Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), 9-22.

1027 Edwards, 96, 97.

1028 Cross, *Dictionary*, 892.

fore such councils were even held.¹⁰²⁹

Finally, whether Origen was condemned or not for embracing reincarnation has little impact on whether the early Christians taught it. Indeed, even *if* it could be proven that Origen embraced reincarnation, there is sufficient evidence that it was not a biblical teaching. With due respect to Origen, its teachings have precedent over his. While his teachings inspire, they are not Scripture and therefore have no inherent apostolic authority. The Bible, on the other hand, is the inspired, authoritative, Word of God. It roundly refutes the idea of reincarnation!

CONCLUSION

If Christ and the Apostles taught reincarnation, as the neo-Gnostics claim, all of Christian theology would need to be re-defined. If the early fathers' embraced reincarnation and it was present in the New Testament canon until its removal in 553, the whole of church history would need to be revised. The

¹⁰²⁹ John Snyder, *Reincarnation vs. Resurrection* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 83.

implications of such change would be equal to or greater than the Reformation. That is, the Gospel message that promises an afterlife hinging on Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, would need to accommodate or include the doctrines of karma and reincarnation. Indeed, if Christ's atonement did not satisfy the debt of sin for humankind, nor was he able to guarantee salvation for the body and soul by rising from the dead, the Gospel message is incomplete, grossly misleading, and a farce. Indeed, in order to achieve salvation, or oneness with *God*, humankind must subject themselves to the doctrines of karma and reincarnation.

If reincarnation was embraced by the early Church and evident in Christian doctrine, its illegitimate removal calls for its reinstatement in every doctrine that falls under the rubric of Christianity, in order to reflect reincarnation thinking. Moreover, an examination of the early fathers' necessitates a correct interpretation of their writings that includes their adherence of reincarnation. In order to accommodate reincarnation, the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox hermeneutics must surrender to the neo-Gnostic interpretation of the Scriptures. Moreover, the ramifications of reincarnation's influence on the past, present and future lives of believers, requires a complete re-working of basic Christian soteriology, or doctrine of salvation.

If the early Christians considered reincarnation a mainstream doctrine, their eschatological scheme makes no sense, as concepts of a bodily resurrection, the Second Coming of Christ, a new heaven and a new earth, and a literal heaven and hell, are unnecessary in reincarnation thinking. Moreover, defending the Christian faith (*apologetics*) would have been unnecessary as the Gospel narratives from which the Incarnation, Virgin Birth, and hope of resurrection derive, would have no historical or theological meaning or significance. That is, defending these doctrines is legitimate only if they represent historical or redemptive significance. In effect, reincarnation thinking nullifies any change because Christianity's core doctrines would be irrelevant. Again, unless Jesus was miraculously born in time and history, dies literally on a cross for sin and salvation, and rises physically from the dead, it is futile to preach redemption for lost souls in any historic or biblical context. If reincarnation were to replace or redefine the biblical doctrine of resurrection, Christianity cannot proclaim a unique gospel, a uniquely human/divine savior, or a unique state in the afterlife.

Finally, if the marriage of reincarnation and Christianity were consummated, Christian missions would be pointless as there would be no basis for evangelizing the lost. That is, Christians could not, nor should they, imply that humans are alienated from the Creator because of sin. Indeed, the best that they could offer is that humans are simply ignorant of their true divine nature.

These assumptions would require a complete reworking of the Christian worldview. If this were to happen, Christianity would cease to be "Christian" and the earlier creeds and confessions, which represent historic Christianity, would no longer define it. The result would be the blending of New Age syncretistic religion with Christianity, thereby producing a religion that possesses no unique message, no unique Savior, and no heaven or hell. Indeed, the Neo-Gnostics already embrace this Eastern metaphysical worldview.

This scenario, however, is not logically nor is it a biblical possibility. While one religion may absorb elements of another one, opposing worldviews cannot at the same time and in the same sense claim the same thing. That is, reincarnation and Christianity cannot claim the same message while holding worldviews that are fundamentally opposed to each other. Indeed, the neo-Gnostic worldview is fundamentally opposed to the Christian worldview on every level. The neo-Gnostics must therefore redefine Christian concepts in order to legitimize "Christian Reincarnationism." More precisely, they force new meaning on Christian doctrine in order to accommodate their historical revisionism. However, their language is nothing more than the semantic double-talk reminiscent of syncretistic religion. Indeed, Christianity opposes syncretism because it cannot assimilate aspects of other religions and remain a unique religion. As we have stated, the blending of Christian doctrine with Eastern-based

metaphysical religion would undermine all of its core doctrines. Moreover, Christianity has consistently claimed to possess a uniquely historical revelation among the religions of the world.¹⁰³⁰ For example, Christians believe in the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ- God's Son assuming flesh. However, the neo-Gnostics regard the Incarnation as an on-going process that enables each soul to experience oneness with each other and with God.¹⁰³¹ Again, historic Christianity defines the Incarnation as a unique, historical event in which God enters the world in Jesus Christ as its only Savior.¹⁰³²

Neo-Gnosticism also denies the Christian doctrines of vicarious atonement for sin and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Rather, they believe in the necessity of Karma, followed by multiple rebirths, in order to achieve salvation. Their system of salvation does not provide vicarious atonement for sin as souls must pay (or atone) for their own sins. Moreover, neo-Gnostics do not envision a future bodily resurrection.

Finally, there is no etymological or theological justification that supports the neo-Gnostic argument that resurrection is a 'form' of reincarnation. Arguing that reincarnation is compatible with Christian belief is to blur the lines of distinction that separate Christianity from other religions.¹⁰³³ Indeed, the uniqueness of Christianity among the world's religions is expressed in its historical and theological truth-claims.¹⁰³⁴

Christianity cannot absorb elements of esoteric religion without destroying the framework that defines it. Indeed, the metaphysical framework of reincarnation has nothing in common with the metaphysical framework of Christianity. Reincarnation theory imbibes an impersonal pantheistic *World Soul*, while Christianity worships a transcendent yet, personal Creator God. Salvation in reincarnation theory is the realization of divinity through knowledge, while salvation in Christianity depends entirely on the atoning work of Christ. The afterlife in reincarnation theory depends on multiple embodiment's until all debt is paid; the afterlife in Christianity depends solely on the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior who paid the debt of sin once, for all eternity.

Just as there can be no marriage of reincarnation and resurrection, there can be no marriage of Christianity with other religions. Indeed, forcing a marriage between opposing worldviews is like mixing oil with water or light with darkness. They simply do not mix. However, despite their differences, world religions can exist side by side. Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, all share basic human traits and observe similar moral and ethical religious codes of conduct. However, sharing human traits does not unify people of different faiths, theologically or spiritually, as they affirm conflicting and often contradictory worldviews. Indeed, the Gospel message is uniquely Christian and is incompatible with the core beliefs of other religions. While Christian perversions exist, the foundation of historic Christianity rests on the belief that God assumes a human nature in the Person of Christ who died for the sins of humankind.¹⁰³⁵ Again, Christianity differs from other religions because

1030 Sir Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: the Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1984), 17.

1031 Ibid, 21.

1032 Ibid.

1033 John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 365.

1034 Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976).

of its unique proclamation, its unique salvation, and its unique disclosure.¹⁰³⁶

While an investigation of the broader philosophical and theological differences between reincarnation and Christianity was not our primary focus, the body of our work has demonstrated an implicit rejection of it by the early Christians. Our discussion of Origen and Neo-Platonism also demonstrated that his views, especially with respect to reincarnation, are in stark contrast with theirs. We have also demonstrated that the Gnostic notion of salvation has nothing in common with Origen's notion of salvation. Moreover, we have examined Origen's extant works and shown that on numerous occasions, he implicitly rejected reincarnation. For these reasons, and others, no reputable study on the general teachings of Jesus and the Apostles have suggested that reincarnation was a viable Christian doctrine.¹⁰³⁷ Indeed, a number of Christian scholars have already refuted it on biblical grounds.¹⁰³⁸

Neo-Gnostic authors routinely cite pro-reincarnation sources to prove that the early fathers embraced reincarnation. However, many scholars having no stake in reincarnation argue that there is no evidence that they did. This raises the question of why scholars examining the same writings arrive at such different conclusions.¹⁰³⁹ We know that human error, unintentional bias, and the misreading of a passage account for some differences of opinion. To some extent, this explains the neo-Gnostic error. However, our view is that most neo-Gnostic authors allow personal bias to color their research. That is, they typically cite the early fathers in part, while avoiding additional works and without due consideration for the broader context of their writings. They also tend to cite secondary source materials without due regard for primary source material. For these reasons, I believe that scholars should carefully examine their conclusions before taking them seriously.

Naturally, there are concerns associated with objectivity in historical research.¹⁰⁴⁰ To some extent, everyone exercises bias through the lens of his or her own worldview. However, possessing less than one-hundred percent certainty does not mean that one may not arrive at some degree of certainty. Simply put, the aim of scholarly research is to collect the data and interpret them according to the facts. We have attempted to achieve this and have concluded that the early fathers' rejected of

1035 1 Corinthians 15: 1-4

1036 Anderson, 21.

1037 See, Bruce Manning Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 136-166; 215-271; J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History*, W. John Cook, ed., (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 305-384; D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992); and, F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 163-194.

1038 See the writer's MA thesis 'A Biblical, Scientific, and Historical Examination of Reincarnation,' submitted to the faculty of the Simon Greenleaf School of Law, Anaheim, CA, 1985. See also, Gary R. Habermas and J.P. Moreland, *Immortality: the Other Side of Death* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation: A Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1982), Norman L. Geisler & J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), John Snyder, *Reincarnation VS. Resurrection* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984), and, Paul Edwards, *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996).

1039 See for example, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 Volumes (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

1040 James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 48-52.

reincarnation.¹⁰⁴¹ Indeed, the facts indicate that there is no concrete evidence to support the notion that the early Christians embraced reincarnation. We have shown that the weight of scholarly opinion agrees with our assessment. However, scholarly consensus does not prove absolute certainty. Scholars may agree about the history of reincarnation and be mistaken as to its metaphysical truth-claims. Indeed, the neo-Gnostic attempt to revise church history in order to accommodate reincarnation, betrays the goal of objectivity in academic research. For this reason, scholars should reject their claim that reincarnation was embraced by the early Christians.

Because neo-Gnostic writers consider Origen to be the greatest example of an early Christian embracing reincarnation, we have focused our attention on his life and teachings. We have argued that Origen's view of *metempsychosis* (transmigration of souls) depends on the extent that he may or may not have been influenced by the prevailing philosophies of the day. That is, if Origen was a Neo-Platonist, one may rightly assume that he embraced *metempsychosis*. However, if he resisted merging Greek thought with Christian belief, we may reasonably assume that he rejected *metempsychosis*. Moreover, Origen's staunchest critics, Pamphilus,¹⁰⁴² Jerome,¹⁰⁴³ and Justinian,¹⁰⁴⁴ often misrepresented his teachings. However, we now know that Jerome admitted that Origen's doctrine of transmigration was not considered doctrinal certainty.¹⁰⁴⁵ Additionally, Origen's rejection of transmigration essentially refutes the notion that he fully embraced Neo-Platonism. While Origen borrowed Greek terms to explain the Christian faith, he selected only those terms which were best suited to communicate Christian belief.¹⁰⁴⁶ That is, communicating Christian belief required that he utilized philosophical concepts that were familiar to his audience. However, utilizing Greek terms does not mean that Origen fully embraced Greek philosophical ideas. Indeed, the Apostle Paul cites Greek sources to make a point regarding the true nature of God.¹⁰⁴⁷ Origen believed that while philosophy served as a useful tool to interpret and communicate the Gospel, it was always subordinate to the Bible.¹⁰⁴⁸ Indeed, before everything else, Origen submitted his thinking to the Scriptures and to the Rule of Faith.¹⁰⁴⁹

Origen rejected *metempsychosis* primarily on theological grounds- every aspect of his thinking opposed it. Accordingly, while his anthropology dictated his eschatology, his doctrine of *apokatastasis* influenced his soteriology. Hence, rational souls reach their goal apart from repeated incarnations in one body, and in one life, the soul reunites with the Creator.¹⁰⁵⁰

We have also shown that Origen argued that the biblical doctrine of salvation repudiated the idea

1041 See Chapter 2, 'Source Testimony and Modern Debate.'

1042 *Apology for Origen* 87; PG 17.579B

1043 *Epistulae* 124.4

1044 Daley, 205.

1045 *Epist.* 124.4

1046 Edwards, 55, 56.

1047 See Acts 17: 22-34 where Paul cites, Epimenides of Knossos (Crete) 6th century B.C. and Aratus of Soli (Cilicia) 315 B.C. – 240 B.C.

1048 Ronald E. Heine, 'God' in *The Westminster Handbook*, 107.

1049 For a survey of Patristic witness to the text of Scripture, see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983), 344-357.

that an infinite series of rebirths, solves the problem of sin. He believed that an infinite series of rebirths perpetuates infinite cycles of sin and therefore compounds the problem rather than solving it. Indeed, Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* effectively accounts for all sin and its impact in creation by reconciling or restoring everything back to its original condition. This means ultimately, that all rational creatures will enjoy a permanent loving union with God without sin or imperfections.¹⁰⁵¹ Implicit in Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* is the rejection of endless cycle of falls and redemption.

We have demonstrated that Origen's notion of the afterlife differs significantly from the Greek and Gnostic notions of the afterlife. Indeed, we contrasted the Greek notion that knowledge leads to true divinity with Origen's belief that while fallen souls reflect God's image, they are sinful and saved through purification, not self-realization. Additionally, we contrasted the Greek idea that souls migrate from one body to the next with Origen's view, that God redeems the soul and body apart from successive embodiment's or repeated lifetimes. Indeed, contrary to Greek and Gnostic thought, Origen's belief in a future resurrection depends on the spiritual and material aspects of salvation present in the resurrection body. He particularly believed that the body has dignity because it houses the soul – an idea foreign to Greek and Gnostic thought.

While Origen's interpretation of the resurrection is problematic, his concerns were not with the doctrine itself, but with the nature of the resurrection body. While his critics accused him of denying the doctrine of resurrection, Origen perceived a resurrection body possessing dominating spiritual properties. Accordingly, he took into account the scientific and theological problems associated with the composition of the resurrection body, and determined not to repeat the mistakes of others. He therefore extrapolates a mediating position which avoided the extreme liberalism of the orthodox and the dualistic error of Gnostics, who denied the physicality of the body.

Finally, we have demonstrated that while Origen's views of hell and judgment differed significantly from other Christians, it had nothing in common with the Greek or Gnostic notions of the afterlife. Indeed, whether he believed that hell was literal or figurative, it was definitive in that its duration was temporary and its purpose remedial. That is, it would accomplish what God intended. Moreover, while Origen's view of eternal punishment is difficult to reconcile with his doctrine of *apokatastasis*, he maintained that there would be a time when all of creation would be in perfect harmony with the Creator.

We have shown that at times Origen implies that salvation includes Satan and other evil spirits, while on other occasions, he denies that it is possible. However, whether temporal or eternal, his view of hell and punishment does not depend on purgation in a reincarnation sense. That is, Origen's sense of purgation is fundamentally at odds with the purgatorial aspect of karma and reincarnation. Origen's view includes finality, whereas, the reincarnation theory continues *ad infinitum*. Moreover, contrary to Origen's cosmological theory, the Greek and Gnostic cosmologies essentially guarantee the repetition of endless cycles of pain and suffering.

The crux of the neo-Gnostic argument rests on their argument that ecclesiastics at the Fifth General Council excise reincarnation from the Bible. Consequently, neo-Gnostics do not believe that modern translations are complete and trustworthy. However, we have demonstrated that their argument has no basis in fact. There simply exists no evidence that anyone tampered with the Bible in 553 in order to further the political ambitions of church authorities. Indeed, the facts surrounding the Fifth General Council bear this out. Contrary to the claims of the neo-Gnostics, the council met to address questions raised by Chalcedon regarding the unity of the two natures of Christ; there was no discussion regarding

1050 Brox, 79.

1051 Daley, 58.

Origen and reincarnation. Indeed, Justinian called the council in order to settle a dispute surrounding the contents of the Three Chapters. Again, there is no evidence that the subject of reincarnation was part of the discussion. By all accounts, this was an attempt by the Emperor to reconcile moderate Monophysites with orthodoxy and to bring some sense of unity to the region. Indeed, the council condemned a popular form of Origenism, not Origen, himself.¹⁰⁵² Again, the records of the conciliar sessions indicate that there was no reference to Origen and reincarnation during the deliberation process.

It is worth noting that copies of the New Testament are so common by the sixth century that it was virtually impossible for officials to expunge doctrines from them in the sixth century.¹⁰⁵³ Indeed, the canonization process of the New Testament took place well before the sixth century, and by every indication, reincarnation was not part of any discussion.¹⁰⁵⁴ In fact, none of the 27 New Testament books recognized as canonical by the end of the fourth century mentions reincarnation. Manuscript evidence dating from the first through sixth centuries clearly bears this out.

The claims of the neo-Gnostics are biblically and historically untenable. The weight of evidence does not support their contention that the early fathers taught reincarnation nor that clerics excised it from the Bible in the sixth century. Moreover, their argument that the Bible taught reincarnation is unsustainable and therefore, false. Indeed, the excision of reincarnation from the Bible in the sixth century is not possible as it is not present in manuscripts dating from the fourth century. Moreover, that Origen is condemned in the sixth century for embracing reincarnation is patently false, as his writings indicate that he clearly rejected it on numerous occasions.

The patristic attitude toward reincarnation is one of skepticism and denial. While some addressed it briefly, others clearly refuted it. Indeed, many of the same fathers that neo-Gnostics cite to prove reincarnation, reject it out of hand. Our survey of patristic writings bears this out. Additionally, while the early fathers debated the subject; they did not consider it to be compatible with Christian belief. Therefore, the neo-Gnostic attempt to reinterpret the early fathers to legitimize reincarnation, is intellectually dishonest.

Origen's attitude towards reincarnation agrees with other early fathers. While he investigated the idea and debated its merits, he rejected reincarnation because it was incompatible with Christian belief.¹⁰⁵⁵ We have demonstrated repeatedly that his Christian upbringing, his knowledge of Scripture, and his devotion to the Rule of Faith, are the reasons that he rejected reincarnation. While he was raised in a predominately Greek culture, he was devoted first to Christ. Indeed, his command of the Scriptures and knowledge of the prevailing philosophies of the day afforded him the head position at the Christian Catechetical School in Alexandria. It is there that he taught subjects common in Hellenistic education and with Christian doctrine, particularly, theology proper, or the study of God. While he probably discussed *metempsychosis* along side other tenets of Greek philosophy, there is no indication that he believed it to have divine origins. He was certainly aware that others had refuted it long before he began teaching in Alexandria.¹⁰⁵⁶ We can assume therefore, that he examined their arguments during his own investigation of the subject.

1052 See Appendix B.

1053 Snyder, 83.

1054 For a discussion of the canonization process, see Geisler and Nix, *Introduction*, 127-195.

1055 See Appendix A.

1056 John Hick, *Death & Eternal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 375.

Origen's consummate desire was to be faithfully committed to Christian doctrine. Indeed, pleasing God and faithfully serving the Church motivated him to seek a deeper meaning of the Scriptures, and to bring others to Christ. The foundations of Origen's thinking rests in his devotion to the Bible and to the Rule of Faith. However, because neither one taught karma or reincarnation, Origen rejected them. That is, he found no justification for incorporating them with the Christian faith. While Origen believed that *metempsychosis* may be theoretically possible, he rejected it on biblical grounds. Moreover, had Origen considered reincarnation compatible with the Christian faith, he would have indicated so in his writings. However, as we have demonstrated throughout our study, in every instance where he mentions or discusses *metempsychosis*, he repudiates it! Despite the evidence, neo-Gnostics continue to cast Origen as a "Christian reincarnationist." Indeed, this label is only possible if they ignore the facts and take him out of context.

Origen is arguably one of the greatest scholars of his day. Because the Alexandrian culture challenged his faith, he flirts with *metempsychosis* and other Greek doctrines. However, to whatever extent it may have influenced him, it did not alter his desire to present Christianity to the intellectuals of his time, in order that he might win them to Christ. Moreover, telling his audience that redemption is possible because of God's love and grace through Christ, but cannot be accomplished except by karma and reincarnation, makes no sense.

To his credit, Origen withstood the critics; resisted full-scale immersion in the ideology of Greek culture; remained faithful to the Scriptures and to the Rule of Faith; and, lived the kind of life congruent with the Christian faith. One scholar put it this way: "...As a true divine, he consecrated all his studies by prayer, and turned them, according to his best convictions, to the service of truth and piety."¹⁰⁵⁷ Origen was, among other things, a scholar, an apologist, and an exegete. However, one thing is clear: he was no "Christian reincarnationist," as the neo-Gnostics assert. There is no such thing!

APPENDIX A

¹⁰⁵⁷ Roberts, 620.

The Anathema's against Origen¹⁰⁵⁸

I

Whoever says or thinks that human souls pre-existed, *i.e.*, that they had previously been spirits and holy powers, but that, satiated with the vision of God, they had turned to evil, and in this way the divine love in them had died out and they had therefore become souls and had been condemned to punishment in bodies, shall be anathema.

II

If anyone says or thinks that the soul of the Lord pre-existed and was united with God the Word before the Incarnation and Conception of the Virgin, let him be anathema.

III

If anyone says or thinks that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was first formed in the womb of the holy Virgin and that afterwards there was united with it God the Word and the pre-existing soul, let him be anathema.

IV

If anyone says or thinks that the word of God has become like to all heavenly orders, so that for the cherubim he was a cherub, for the seraphim a seraph: in short, like all the superior powers, let him be anathema.

V

If anyone says or thinks that at the resurrection, human bodies will rise spherical in form and unlike our present form, let him be anathema.

VI

If anyone says that the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the waters that are above heavens, have souls, and are reasonable beings, let him be anathema.

VII

If anyone says or thinks that Christ the Lord in a future time will be crucified for demons, as he was for man, let him be anathema.

VIII

If anyone says or thinks that the power of God is limited, and that he created as much as he was able to compass, let him be anathema.

IX

If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary, and will one day have an end, and that a restoration will take place of demons and of impious men, let him be anathema.

APPENDIX B

¹⁰⁵⁸ See, THE ANATHEMA'S OF THE EMPEROR JUSTINIAN AGAINST ORIGEN CONSTANTINOPLE A.D. 543 at <http://www.cristoraul.com/readinghall/Western-Civilization-Jewels/HEFELE/Book-13/254-257.html>.

PROPOSITIONS AGAINST REINCARNATION¹⁰⁵⁹

I

Neither Christ nor the Apostles taught reincarnation (*metempsychosis*).

II

Reincarnation is found nowhere in the Old or New Testaments.

III

The Rule of Faith or Canon of Truth does not refer to reincarnation.

IV

The early Fathers not only rejected reincarnation, but also wrote treatises refuting it.

V

That cleric's excised reincarnation from the Bible in the sixth century is historically untenable.

VI

The Second Council of Constantinople (553) did not anathematize Origen for embracing reincarnation.

VII

The close of the New Testament canon by the fourth century refutes the notion that reincarnation is excised from the Bible in the sixth century.

VIII

The biblical doctrine of resurrection is not a form of reincarnation.

IX

All the core doctrines of orthodox biblical Christianity are at variance with reincarnation.

X

No manuscript dating from the first through the sixth century mentions reincarnation.

XI

Origen rejected metempsychosis primarily on biblical grounds.

XII

The hope of the Church is a future bodily resurrection, not reincarnation.

APPENDIX C

¹⁰⁵⁹ These propositions are suggested by the author of this thesis.

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Origeniana: Premier colloque international des études origéniennes (1975) eds. Henri Crouzel, Gennaro Lomiento, Joseph Rius-Camps (Bari: Università Istituto di Letteratura Christiana Antica, 1975).

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Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer, eds. S. Kaczmarek and H. Pietras, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 244 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

APPENDIX D

¹⁰⁶⁰ We are indebted to the following source for these references:
http://moses.creighton.edu/harmless/Bibliographies_for_Theology/Patristics_3.html

The Church Fathers on Reincarnation

Justin Martyr (A.D. 100- 165)¹⁰⁶¹

Chapter IV, Dialogue with Trypho. The Soul of Itself Cannot See God; The First Apology. Chapter LXI, Christian Baptism

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215)¹⁰⁶²

Chapter III, Stromata. On Marriage; Book 7, Chapter VI, Prayers and Praise from a Pure Mind, Ceaselessly Offered, Far Better than Sacrifices; Book 4, Chapter XII, Basilides' Idea of Martyrdom Refuted.

Tatian the Assyrian (A.D. 110-172)¹⁰⁶³

Chapter III, Ridicule of the Philosophers; Chapter VI, Christians' Belief in the Resurrection; Chapter XIII, Theory of the Soul's Immortality

Irenaeus (A.D. 120- 202)¹⁰⁶⁴

Against Heresies, Book 2, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-59.htm>\\l P7249_1915874>.

Tertullian (A.D. 160- 230)¹⁰⁶⁵

Chapter XXXIII, The Opinions of Sundry Heretics Which Originate Ultimately With Plato; Chapter

1061 J.C.M. van Winden, *An Early Christian Philosophy: Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho* Paul Vincent Spade, trans., (Philosophia patrum, Vol. 1), Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971; *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, 4; PG. 6, 486; *Apologia I pro Christianis*, 61; PG. 6, 420.

1062 *Library of Christian Classics*, Volume II, 'Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origen with Introduction and Notes,' John Ernest Leonard Oulton, & Henry Chadwick (Westminster Press, Philadelphia), 1954. See also, *Eclogae ex Scripturis Prophetis*, XVII; PG. 9, 706; *Excerpta ex scriptis Theodoti*, XXVIII; PG. 9, 674; *Stromatum* lib.III, c.3; PG. 8, 1114, 1115; lib. IV, c. 112; PG. 8, 1290-1291.

1063 See Tatian, 'Address of Tatian to the Greeks' as found in Philip Schaff's, *Fathers of the Second Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 2004.

1064 Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Ethereal Library) 2001. See also, *Contra Haereses*, lib. II, c. 33; PG. 7, 830,833.

1065 Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, quoted from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to a.d. 325*, Vol. 3, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition). See also, *Liber de anima*, c. 28; PL. 2, 740; c. 31; PL. 2, 744; c.32; PL. 2, 745; c. 34; PL. 2, 751; c. 35; PL. 2, 71.

XXIV, *Plato's Inconsistency. He Supposes the Soul Self-Existent, Yet, Capable of Forgetting What Passed In a Previous State*); Chapter XXVIII, *The Pythagorean Doctrine of Transmigration Sketched and Censured*; Chapter XXXI, *Further Exposure of Transmigration, Its Inextricable Embarrassment*; Chapter XXXIV, *These Vagaries Stimulated Some Profane Corruptions of Christianity. The Profanity of Simon Magus Condemned*)

Hippolytus (A.D. 170 - 236)¹⁰⁶⁶

Book 7, Chapter, XX. *The Heresy of Carpocrates; Wicked Doctrines Concerning Jesus Christ; Practise Magical Arts; Adopt a Metempsychosis.*

Minucius Felix (dates unknown- 2nd Cent. A.D)¹⁰⁶⁷

Chapter XXXIV, *Argument: Moreover, It is Not at All to Be Wondered at If This World is to Be Consumed by Fire, Since Everything Which Has a Beginning Has Also an End. And the Ancient Philosophers are Not Averse from the Opinion of the Probable Burning Up of the World. Yet It is Evident that God, Having Made Man from Nothing, Can Raise Him Up from Death into Life. And All Nature Suggests a Future Resurrection*

Origen (A.D. 185 – 254)¹⁰⁶⁸

Book I, Chapter XXXII, *Origen Against Celsus*); Book I, Chapter XXXIII, *Against Celsus*); Book IV, Chapter LXXXIII, *Against Celsus*); Book 8, Chapter XXX, *Against Celsus*; Book 1, Chapter VIII, *On First Principles*); Second Book of the Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew. Book XIII, *Relation of The Baptist To Elijah The Theory Of Transmigration Considered*; Second Book of the Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew. Book XIII, *The "Spirit and Power of Elijah" –Not the Soul –Were in the Baptist*; Commentary on John, Book 6, Chapter VII, *Of the Birth of John, and of His Alleged Identity with Elijah of the Doctrine of Transcorporation*); De Principiis, Book 2, Chapter IX. *On the World and the Movements of Rational Creatures, Whether Good or Bad; And on the Causes of Them*); (De Principiis, Book 2, Chapter IX. *On the World and the Movements of Rational Creatures, Whether Good or Bad; And on the Causes of Them*; De Principiis, Book 2, Chapter IX. *On the World and the Movements of Rational Creatures, Whether Good or Bad; and the Causes of Them*

Jerome (A.D. 331 –420)¹⁰⁶⁹

Letter CXXIV: To Avitus

1066 Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, as quoted in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ibid., Vol. V.

1067 Minucius Felix, *The Octavius*, as quoted in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IV.

1068 Origen as quoted in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IV. See also, *In epistolam and Romanos*, lib. V, PG. 14, 1015; *In Evangelium Joannis*, PG. 14, 220 and John S. Uebersax, 'Early Christianity and Reincarnation: Modern Misrepresentations of Quotes by Origen' in *Works on Psychology and Religion* at <<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jsuebersax/origen1.htm>> Copyright 2006. Retrieved June 14, 2007.

1069 St. Jerome, *Letter CXXIV: to Avitus*, as quoted in Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Vol. VI., M.A., Freemantle, ed., W.R. Clark, trans., (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library); Print basis, (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1892). See also, Lib. II, c. 11; *PL*. 26, 74.

Arnobius (A.D. 255 – 330?)¹⁰⁷⁰

Against the Heathen, Book II, XV; *Against the Heathen*, Book II, XVI; *Against the Heathen*, Book II, XXVIII

Lactantius (A.D. 260 – 330)¹⁰⁷¹

The Divine Institutes, Chapter XVIII. *The Pythagoreans and Stoics, While They Hold the Immortality of the Soul, Foolishly Persuade a Voluntary Death*; The Divine Institutes, Chapter XIX. *Cicero and Others of the Wisest Men Teach the Immortality of the Soul, But in an Unbelieving Manner; And that a Good or an Evil Death Must Be Weighed from the Previous Life*; The Divine Institutes, Chapter XXXVI. *Of the Philosophers, Namely, Epicurus and Pythagoras*

Basil the Great (A.D. 340 –397)¹⁰⁷²

Homily VIII, *The Creation of Fowl and Water Animals*

Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 331- 395)¹⁰⁷³

On the Making of Man, XXVIII. *To Those Who Say that Souls Existed Before Bodies, or that Bodies Were Formed Before Souls; Wherein There is Also a Refutation of the Fables Concerning Transmigration of Souls; On the Soul and the Resurrection*

Ambrose (A.D. 340 – 397)¹⁰⁷⁴

1070 Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* as quoted in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.VI, ‘The Fathers of the Third Century’.

1071 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol.VII, ‘The Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century’ See also, *Divinarum Institutionum*, lib. III: *De falsa sapientia philosophorum*, c. 18; *PL.* 6, 409, 410; *Divinarum Institutionum*, liv. VII: *De Vita beata*, c. 12; *PL.* 6, 777.

1072 Basil, *The Hexaemeron* as quoted from *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol. VIII., trans. Henry W. Norman, 8:95-96. See also, *Homilia VIII in Hexaemeron*, 2; *PG.* 29, 167.

1073 *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol.V., trans. William Moore and H.A. Wilson, 5: 419, 449, 453-459. See also, *De hominis opificio*, c. 28; *PG.* 44, 232.

1074 Ambrose, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-10/Npnf2-10-16.htm>> \l "P3443_813408" \t "_top" Book II, as quoted from *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol.X., trans. H.A. Wilson, 5: 419. See also, Lib. II, n. 130; *PL.* 16, 1412.

Book II, *On the Belief in the Resurrection*, 36-68; Book II, *On the Belief in the Resurrection*, 126-132.

St. John Chrysostom (A.D. 347 – 407)¹⁰⁷⁵

Homilies on the Gospel of St. John. Homily II

Augustine (A.D. 354 –430)¹⁰⁷⁶

Contra Academicos, 3.18; The Confessions, Chapter VI., 9. *He Describes His Infancy, and Lauds the Protection and Eternal Providence of God* The Confessions, Chapter VI., 10. *He Describes His Infancy, and Lauds the Protection and Eternal Providence of God*; The City of God, Book X, Chapter 30. *Porphyry's Emendations and Modifications of Platonism*; The City of God, Book X, Chapter 31, *Against the Arguments on Which the Platonists Ground Their Assertion that the Human Soul is Co-Eternal with God.*

¹⁰⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, as quoted from Phillip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Series I, Vol. XIV., trans. G.P. Stupart, 14:5. See also, *In Joannem homilia* II al. I, PG. 59, 31.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Augustine, as quoted from Phillip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Series I, Vol. I 'Prolegomena: St. Augustine's Life and Work, Confessions Letters,' trans. J.G. Pilkington, 1:47; Vol.2 'The City of God, Christian Doctrine,' trans. Marcus Dods, 2:200. See also, *In heptateuchum*, lib., IV, c 8; PL. 34, 725.

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